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TO
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The LADDER *to*
THE STARS

The LADDER *to* THE STARS

By
JANE H. FINDLATER



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THE LADDER TO THE STARS

CHAPTER I

It was a very warm Sunday afternoon in early summer, and Miriam Sadler had walked all the way from Hindcup-in-the-Fields to Hindcup Manor, to call upon her Aunt Susan Pillar, Lady Joyce's housekeeper. She approached the Manor by the back avenue, of course; but even this entrance was imposing enough. Miriam loved the century-old beech trees, their boughs courtesying to the earth, that bordered each side of the road; under their green shade the girl stopped, and turned her remarkable face up to gaze into the flickering depths above her. After the glare of the mid-day sunlight it seemed almost dark here under the trees. She noticed the splendid spring of the tree boles skyward. "Once they were little beechnuts, hidden in the earth like a grave," she said to herself; "but they pushed up through the sods and grew and grew, and now see their splendid growth and stature!"

Miriam was fond of words for their own sake, quite apart from any meaning they might have—so fond of them that sometimes alone in the back kitchen at home she would repeat over and over to herself strings of words for nothing but their sound—"Great and glori-

THE LADDER

ous and supercelestial, evanescent, elemental, majestic, mystical, and melodramatic"—they rolled off the tip of her tongue like a tune. But, as you see, her thoughts were busy as well as her lips. She was always thinking, thinking, thinking—unformed, chaotic thoughts that led nowhere. This afternoon the stillness under the beech trees was almost oppressive. It was so hot that all the world except Miriam seemed to have gone asleep. Far away in the meadows the sleepy, slow-running river kept up a gentle reminder of its flowing, and some rooks in the elm trees in the park gave sleepy caws every now and then; but otherwise there was no sound or murmur of sound. As she came into the courtyard of the Manor, the stable dog rushed out from his kennel with a startling rattle of his chain and a tremendous bark. A kitchen maid came sleepily to the door, blinking in the afternoon sunshine, and greeted Miriam to a cold welcome; she was no favorite in the servants' hall.

"It's you, Miss Sadler; yes, Mrs. Pillar is in her sittin' room; will you come inside?" she said, holding open the door to let her pass in. A garden boy had appeared to see what the dog was barking at, and Miriam saw that he and the kitchen maid exchanged a wink at her expense. She did not mind; but youth is youth, and even a garden boy's wink wasn't altogether pleasant. Miriam laid down the yellow cotton parasol she had carried, and, as she went along the passage to the housekeeper's room, began to pull off her white thread gloves, which, owing to the heat, were adhering firmly to her hands.

"Lor', Miriam!" cried Aunt Pillar, jumping up

TO THE STARS

from her armchair where she had been having a well-earned nap, "to think of you walking across the fields on such a warm afternoon as this! Whatever possessed you?"

Miriam sat down by the round table which stood in the middle of the room, and with a final tug got off the damp thread gloves and laid them on the table. A weariness of mind, not of body, overcame her for a moment at this reception.

"Oh, I do not know; I like the exercise and the freshness of the fields and the quiet," she explained.

Aunt Pillar surveyed her niece disapprovingly, pursing her lips together.

"It's a blowzing walk, take it any way you please," she said; "but I'm glad to see you, and how is sister?"

"Oh, mother is well, thanks," said Miriam absently. She took up one of her gloves and began to pull out the fingers of it.

"I do wish you weren't so absent-minded like," said Aunt Pillar impatiently. She was a little cross at being wakened from her delicious Sunday nap by a girl who apparently had nothing to say, and who looked as if her thoughts were a hundred miles away. Aunt Pillar crossed and uncrossed her fat feet on the footstool with ill-concealed impatience, and smoothed out the creases from her black silk skirt.

"I have come to ask you something, aunt," the girl said at last, with a desperate effort. "That is why I have come. I want to talk to you about myself."

"There's little else that young persons ever care to talk about—those I've known," said Aunt Pillar, not very graciously. But Miriam had never expected

THE LADDER

a gracious reception. Her rather heavy features were not of the kind that quickly betray emotion; no one could have guessed all she felt at that moment.

"The fact is that I want more education," she said quietly. "I have such a craving for truth and knowledge, aunt, and I did not learn much at Miss Cumper's; all she taught me was superficial and provincial. I wish to go to London to study, and I have no money—will you help me?"

Nothing could well have surprised or displeased Aunt Pillar more than this request. Intellectual woman, and her place in the scheme of things, did not appeal to Aunt Pillar. In her eyes, woman was a marrying, child-bearing creature, or else a house-keeper; she laughed to scorn any further pretensions of her sex.

Putting on a pair of spectacles, she gazed at her niece for a full minute before making any answer. During that minute Miriam counted the heavy beating of her own heart in horrid trepidation. At last Aunt Pillar took off her spectacles, replaced them in their case, laid the case on a table that stood by her chair, and spoke:

"Well, *no*, Miriam, that I won't. You've had, in my opinion, education enough to ruin your prospects already, and I won't be the one to help you to more. It's no kindness."

"My prospects!" cried the girl. "What prospects?"

"Your prospects of a good husband—what every young woman should look out for; what else would you be after?"

TO THE STARS

"Aunt Pillar," she cried, rising in her excitement, and resting her hand on the table, "Aunt Pillar, I'm made for better things than that!" Her voice trembled with emotion, her eyes filled with tears, and the hand which rested on the table shook.

"Better things!" Aunt Pillar ejaculated. "Better things, indeed! The girl's crazed to speak such nonsense!"

"I am not crazed, or even conceited; I know only too well the depths of my own ignorance. I must have education—and then I shall surprise you all."

"You surprise me already, Miriam, with your silly pride, and talking wild nonsense like that," said Aunt Pillar. "What you have to do is to settle down in your mother's house, and take the first good man that asks you. You'll never get one with book-learning; there's nothing the men dislike more—mind you that."

"Well, if they do, they will never like me, for I have been born that way, and I must follow my bent," said Miriam. She paused again, and then broke out with: "Oh, aunt, don't refuse to help me! I've never asked a penny of you before; but it's life I am asking of you now—life and hope!"

Aunt Pillar was seriously alarmed now. In her estimation nothing except an unhinged brain could possibly account for all this nonsense. She rose from her chair and stood confronting her niece; her short portly figure in its black silk gown seemed the very epitome of what she was, a decent, vulgar-minded Englishwoman of the lower middle class. Strange that tragedy should center round such a figure; but it did. To Miriam the tragedy of that refusal could not

THE LADDER

be exaggerated; it meant to her the loss, as she had said, of life and hope.

As the aunt and niece stood thus facing each other in silence, a sound of footsteps came down the passage, and a light little tap sounded on the panel of the door. In a moment the whole expression of Aunt Pillar's face had altered.

"That's some of the Family," she whispered to Miriam. It must have been by some subtle inner sense that this was revealed to her, for one knock is after all much like another; she ran to open the door and usher in the august intruders.

"Why, Miss Eve, is this you? and am I to have the honor of a visit? I'm sure I'm very proud, indeed, Miss Eve. Will you step in? and this is Mr. Alan Gore too; step in, sir, I'm very pleased to see you," she exclaimed all in a breath. "And, Miss Eve, this is my niece, Miriam Sadler, who has walked over to see me this afternoon; it will be a great day for her, getting a sight of you, I'm sure; girls like her have few advantages. Come here, Miriam, and speak to Miss Eve."

She spoke for all the world as though her niece were still a child in a pinafore, instead of a young woman of four-and-twenty.

Miss Joyce evidently meant to be affable, for she held out her hand to the girl, and asked if she had not had a very hot walk.

"No," said Miriam, "I like the walk."

Miss Joyce sat down, and begged Aunt Pillar to resume her seat, which she did with some show of reluctance. The man who had come in with Miss Joyce

TO THE STARS

looked round to find himself a seat, too, and Aunt Pillar told her niece to fetch a chair for Mr. Gore. Miriam lugged out a great old chair from a corner for him. He thanked her and sat down, wondering what he would say to this heavy-featured young woman.

"We have come to see the old lead cistern which lives somewhere in these regions," he said. "I dare say you have often seen it—it has curious figures carved on it."

"Oh, yes, I love the beauty of it," said Miriam. The young man looked up sharply at her words.

"Are you interested in such things?" he asked.

"Surely, everyone must be; they link us on to the famous past," she answered. He looked at her even more curiously, and leaned forward as he said:

"The famous past? Do you think the past is any more famous than the present? I incline to think *this* is the accepted time, *this* is the day of salvation."

It was almost the first time in her life that Miriam had heard anyone start an abstract subject of conversation. She drew in a long breath of surprise and delight.

"The present to me always seems ignoble compared with the past," she stammered out.

"Ah, but isn't that only—only the glamour of time? After all, the past was the present to the men of those days, just the same as ours is to us."

"Then you do not think the old days were finer, more romantic than our times?" asked Miriam. It was an entirely new idea to her.

The young man smiled—a smile that lit up his face

THE LADDER

as suddenly as if a lamp had been lighted behind his eyes. It seemed to express a world of meaning, that smile—pleasant, pleasant experiences stored in his memory, grand views of a brave and worthy world.

“Not a bit finer or more romantic than the present time; men and women and their lives are what make the interest of the world, and the outward conditions have little to do with it.”

Miriam gave a gasp of interest; but at this moment Aunt Pillar broke in upon the conversation.

“Miriam, will you fetch two candles from the pantry?” she said. “The passage is dark, and Miss Eve wishes to see the old cistern.”

When the candles had been fetched and lighted, Aunt Pillar, with many apologies for preceding her visitors down the passage, advanced in the direction of the cistern. Miss Joyce followed close behind the housekeeper, holding up her beautiful frilled skirts above wonderful shoes, and Miriam followed her, in company with Mr. Alan Gore. He walked with his hand thrust deep down into his pocket—a habit he had—turning when he spoke, and looking down at her with an amused, pleased expression.

Miriam was in a vast state of excitement, for she had grasped the fact that she was at this moment, and for the first time in her life (and probably the last), talking to one of those distinguished men whose names one read in the papers, whose speeches were quoted all over the country; one of the men who made things happen in the world. And instead of being difficult to speak to, this man seemed, as the Bible said, to understand her thoughts afar off. She longed to grasp such

TO THE STARS

a golden opportunity, and, of course, failed to do so, just because she was too eager about it. Probably never again in life would she be able to exchange a word with Mr. Alan Gore, and here she was, walking beside him, tongue-tied and stupid as any schoolgirl.

Gore, on his part, was wondering what sort of creature this niece of the Joyces' housekeeper could be. He looked down at her strange, large-featured, immobile face and thought he read something unusual there.

"What books do you read?" he asked suddenly, without any preamble, taking for granted that she read.

"I have few books," said Miriam. "There is no good library at Hindcup-in-the-Fields, and I have read all the books I can borrow." She could not avoid this sententiousness which overtakes those who attempt to reform their original speech.

"I wonder if I could lend you any," Gore began. But just as this suggestion had fallen from his lips, Aunt Pillar stood still beside the old cistern and began to explain the carvings upon it. It took some time for the visitors to examine these, and then Miss Joyce suggested that they had seen enough.

"It's dark and drippy down in these cellar places," she said. "Come, Mr. Gore, we will ascend into the upper regions again. Good afternoon, Mrs. Pillar, and thank you. I'm afraid we have disturbed the quiet of your Sunday. Good afternoon, Miriam." And she swept away down the passage without leaving Gore time for another word with Miriam.

"Here, take one of the candles, and look to your gown; they do drip dreadful in this draught; better

THE LADDER

put yours out, or your dress will be all a-spot with grease," said Aunt Pillar. She gathered up her skirts and stepped off down the passage toward the house-keeper's room, puffing from her exertions. Miriam followed slowly, the extinguished candle in her hand.

"I feel like that," she said to herself as she looked at the cold, black wick—"a flame one minute and then blown out. I don't suppose he will remember anything about the books. Miss Joyce said, 'Let us come up into the upper regions'; that also is like me. I remain down below; happier people breathe an upper air."

Aunt Pillar's voice broke in upon her melancholy thoughts:

"You'll be ready for your tea now, Miriam; I will be having mine directly. That new kitchen maid is worritting the life out of me; never a meal in time.—It's her duty to set them, you see.—I think the stable boy's courting her, she's that forgetful. I have a business keeping them all at their work, I can tell you!"

Miriam followed her aunt into the parlor as if she walked in a dream, and listened, throughout the meal that followed, to her aunt's comments on their visitors.

"I daresay it will be a match between them," she said. "She is a fine-looking young lady, to be sure."

TO THE STARS

CHAPTER II

THE Sadlers were Wesleyans; that is to say, Mrs. Sadler was one heart and soul, while her daughter was one in name only. Twice every Sunday they went to chapel, and every Sunday evening Mr. Hobbes, the Wesleyan minister, and his wife came to supper with the Sadlers, "for it saves Mrs. Hobbes the trouble of cooking," as Mrs. Sadler invariably remarked, as each Sunday came round. This recurrence of tiny, scarcely noticeable incidents often becomes very irksome to young creatures; Miriam found herself waiting for the invariable "it saves Mrs. Hobbes" to come, and it always came. With changeless regularity, too, the Hobbeses sat down to the cold Sunday supper, year in and year out; Mr. Hobbes said the same long grace before meat and (so it seemed to Miriam) they spoke about the same things each night. Now it is not of the nature of woman to be an Ishmael; she likes to conform to the views of those about her; it does not please her to be in revolt from custom; but deep down in this young woman's heart was a savage feeling of revolt from her surroundings. She still went unresistingly to chapel with her mother, still listened without dissent to all that Mr. Hobbes said; but she knew it was not going to be for long—a time must come when she would rebel.

This Sunday evening was, of course, no exception

THE LADDER

to the general rule. Miriam had to hurry on the way home, and arrived hot and tired, just in time to go to chapel with her mother. A smell of new varnish filled the building, which had been freshly "done up" by the local house painter. The walls were a bright shade of flesh pink, "picked out" at their junction with the boarding by a floral design in darker red. The congregation, this fine evening, was small and sleepy, and Mr. Hobbes tried to awaken the sleepers by very energetic methods; his over-emphasis offended every sensibility of Miriam's nature; but she was a girl of extremely impartial judgment, and as she listened to the preacher she kept saying to herself, "Even though I dislike his style of preaching, I should respect his beliefs because they are genuine; he is a good man in his own way, though it is such an objectionable way!" And then, having tried to be impartial, she would confess her own entire separation of heart from all Mr. Hobbes's creeds and methods of promulgating them. As he waxed more and more urgent in appeal, she felt colder and colder. "This is not God's way, this is man's way," she said to herself. The hymns, too, provoked her by their stridency, their urgency, their familiarity. Only now and again some of the more old-fashioned verses made a true appeal to her heart; then she thought: "I might find God if I were left alone to find Him, with fine, dignified, worthy words like these to help me, and without being irritated and disgusted by other people."

One such hymn was sung this evening. Miriam loved the undecorated short meter of the verse, and the simple metaphor:

TO THE STARS

"Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood
Stand decked in living green."

How beautiful it was! Long ago, when she was a little child, she had cried aloud in chapel during the singing of this hymn, because she thought it meant that some awful day, all alone, with no grown person near to help her, she must wade through the Hindcup river, which was so terribly black and deep, or else be forever shut out of heaven. But time had softened this terrible impression, and she now felt only pleasure in the beauty of the words, the truth of the imagery. When this hymn had been sung, the benediction was pronounced, and the heated congregation streamed out into the cool evening air. Miriam and her mother always hurried home at a great pace, so as to be ready to receive Mr. and Mrs. Hobbes. Supper, as I have said, was cold, but a cup of Symington's Essence of Coffee (a thick brown liquid, a teaspoonful of which was poured from a bottle into each cup and filled up with boiling water) cheered the coldly furnished feast toward its close.

Conversation during this meal always followed the same lines—the number of persons at chapel; who had seemed attentive; who inattentive; whether such or such a preacher was expected shortly in Hindcup—these were the usual topics. But this evening a remark from Mrs. Sadler that Miriam had been at the Manor to see her aunt, provided fresh subject for discussion.

Mr. Hobbes had drawn his chair nearer to the open window and was enjoying his essence of coffee when Mrs. Sadler imparted this bit of news to him. He turned at once to Miriam and asked her with a would-

THE LADDER

be sarcastic emphasis whether she had seen anything of the "big people" at the Manor, adding: "I hear Mr. Alan Gore arrived there last night; I should like to see him; I am afraid that he holds dangerous views."

"He'll be one of those dreadful freethinkers," said Mrs. Sadler, shaking her head.

"I doubt it is so; I doubt it is so; a speech of his which I saw reported not long ago was strongly flavored with doubt and unbelief."

"Dear, dear!" sighed Mrs. Sadler, and the sigh over Gore's defections was echoed by both Mr. and Mrs. Hobbes. Miriam kept her own counsel; worlds would not have made her reveal that she had that afternoon spoken with the subject of their animadversions.

"I feel like a dog with a bone whenever I have anything that I like to think about," she thought. "I go away and hide it, and only dig it up again when I am quite alone." She smiled to herself then, and sat silent. But not for long was she to be let alone. Mr. Hobbes belonged to what he would himself have called the aggressive school of Christian workers; his motto was "Instant in season and out of season"; so, inspired by the last mouthfuls of coffee essence, he turned to her and began:

"And now, Miriam, what are you going to do to hasten the coming of the Kingdom? I think it is time that you took a more decided stand, and began some definite Christian work. What do you say to a Bible class? We are in want of a teacher."

"A Bible class!" the girl exclaimed; "what would I teach?"

TO THE STARS

"Just the simple Gospel story; *no* wisdom is required for *that*," said Mr. Hobbes, and really believed what he said.

"Wisdom is more required in the teaching of religion than in anything else in the world," said Miriam, with an energy and conviction that struck her listeners dumb. There was silence for quite a minute, till Mrs. Sadler exclaimed:

"Oh, my dear! how dare you speak up to Mr. Hobbes in that way!"

"Because I mean it, and believe it, mother, and I do not see why one should not say what one thinks," her daughter answered. She had risen from her chair, flushed and trembling, ready to fight for liberty of speech. In an evil hour Mr. Hobbes began to argue with this strayed sheep of his fold.

"Oh, that just depends on whether one's opinions are *right* and *wise* and *good* opinions," he began. But Miriam would have none of his arguments.

"Not in the least," she said; "it just depends on whether the opinions are *mine*—my own. If they are, then they are right for me, whatever all the world may think or believe."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" ejaculated Mrs. Sadler. What serpent was this that she had been warming in her bosom all these years? Of late she had been a little unhappy about Miriam somehow, but never, never had she feared that things were as bad as this—that daughter of hers should assert her claim to freedom of thought and speech as opposed not only to Mr. Hobbes but to all the thinking, believing world!

"She takes after her poor father, Mr. Hobbes," she

THE LADDER

said, with a dismally prophetic shake of her head. It was generally known in Hindcup that the late Mr. Sadler had been something of a trial to his wife. He was not a native of the little town, and that fact alone was an offense to the townspeople; then he had never consorted much with anyone there, and had been known to have a dangerous love of books. These were all suspicious facts. He had a nasty, sarcastic tongue, and used it freely against those of his neighbors who offended him, and alas, very frequently against his wife. It was not Mrs. Sadler's fault that she was stupid; and it was certainly his fault that he had married her; but these were facts that Joseph Sadler had always ignored in his contemptuous references to the wife of his bosom. Such a husband had been no great loss; and the widow may perhaps be excused for exclaiming so sadly that her child "took after him."

There was another ominous silence; then Miriam got up and left the room. When she was gone, her elders drew nearer to one another and discussed this new position that she had taken up.

Their conclusions, when arrived at, were distressingly mistaken. Miriam was to be "lovingly" and unwearyingly "dealt with" by one member or another of their community. Mr. Hobbes himself would "take an early opportunity" of speaking to her, and he would mention her case to another church member who had great powers of winning young souls.

Finally, in deep distress, Mrs. Sadler asked Mr. Hobbes to pray with her for her erring child. The prayer was offered up; but prayers are not always answered exactly as we wish them to be.

TO THE STARS

CHAPTER III

HINDCUP-IN-THE-FIELDS, as you would judge from its name, lies among meadows wide and marshy. It is scarcely possible to walk across them without getting your feet wet; but this moist soil induces a lush growth of delightful flowers and grasses—buttercups, cuckoo-pints, and buck-beans. Here Miriam loved to walk conferring with her own heart, and gloating with an extraordinary rapture upon the beautiful world. It was not always easy for her to get out, for girls of her class are not brought up to an out-of-door life, and Mrs. Sadler preferred to see her daughter sewing in the afternoons. But more and more of late the girl disregarded her mother's hints, and went off to the meadows for hours at a time.

A meandering path, which twisted so as to avoid the marshiest bits of the fields, wound along in the direction of the Manor. It was little frequented, and at the crossing of two fences there was a low stile with two steps. Here Miriam used to sit, watching until the sun had gone down, a red ball behind the church spires and house roofs of Hindcup. Then, when the dusk began to fall, and the quiet of evening stole over the land, she reluctantly turned her steps homeward.

A few days after the Sunday evening of her revolt, Miriam came slowly along this favorite path toward the stile. Rather to her surprise, she saw that some

THE LADDER

one was there before her, and the next moment she recognized Mr. Alan Gore. She hesitated, stood still for a moment, and then came on. Gore rose from the stile to let her pass, and then, seeing who it was, turned to speak to her.

"I am blocking up the stile," he said, as he moved aside.

Miriam could not reply—her thoughts were in a wild confusion. Would she dare?—She must; it was life itself at stake! She turned her strange face to him, unsmiling, troubled.

"Sir," she cried, "will you lend me some books? You said—you—" Her words trailed off into silence. Would he be angry?

"Books? Why, yes; I am honored to lend you anything in my power," said Gore, with a gravity and kindness that set all her fears at rest. He motioned to the stile. "Won't you sit down and tell me about yourself?" he said. "Then I shall know better what to send you."

"I do not know what to tell you. I do not know where to begin!" Miriam exclaimed. She sat down on the step of the stile, and Gore leaned against the fence, waiting for her to begin her story.

"Well?" he asked.

"I want knowledge, and I cannot get it. I want to find a faith that satisfies me—or even an unbelief that is certain—I want a life—" She hesitated, and stopped again.

"Have you ever seen any of Blake's pictures?" Gore asked suddenly. "No? Well, there's one absurd little thumb-nail sketch of two little manikins

TO THE STARS

putting up a ladder to try to reach the stars, and under it is written, '*I want! I want!*' That's about your—all our—position, is it not?"

"That's it, that's it!" cried Miriam, clasping her hands together in an ecstasy—the ecstasy of finding herself understood at last. "'*I want, I want*'; and I know of no ladder to reach the stars."

"There is none," said Gore gravely.

"Oh, sir, don't say that! some people reach them; surely you have reached them yourself!"

"I?" he said, in unaffected surprise. "No, no; '*I want, I want*,' too, and ever shall, till this race is run."

"Ah, but then you are running the race," said Miriam bitterly.

"And can you not run yours?" he asked.

"If I had one, perhaps—oh, I do not know where to turn," she cried.

"May I give you some advice? Do not be in too great a hurry to choose your road," said Gore. "You are young, and so must probably wander about on a good many wrong paths before you find the right one. You must have patience with yourself."

Miriam considered this bit of advice in silence. Youth is proverbially impatient, so this was not very palatable counsel. Gore went on after a minute:

"What books do you wish to have? What have you already read?"

"I wish to read all the poets, all the historians, all the novelists," she began, and then laughed at her own absurdity; and Gore laughed with her.

"There's a life-work for you!" he said. "But why

THE LADDER

do you wish to do all this reading? What is to be the end of it all? Have you any aim before you?"

"Yes, I must get away from the world I live in now, and I am not fit for any other yet. I wish to be able to live among people who care for the same things that I care for."

"Why do you wish to leave your own world?" Gore asked kindly.

"Because every week I seem to grow farther away from everyone in it; they do not like me; even my own mother would like me to be different from what I am."

Gore looked upon the ground and meditated. This was a very curious young woman. He felt sorry for her, but was it wise to help her to widen the gulf which seemed already to lie between her and her people?

"Well," he said at length, "you shall have the books. I'll send you any number on one condition—that you work at them, not reading only, but reread them to find out all they have to teach you. That never hurt anyone yet. Perhaps they will help you; that will largely depend upon yourself. I'll send them next week. When you are quite done with them, will you send them back to me, and write to me, telling me what you have gained from them—if anything? Then I'll send you some more, if you wish for them. Does this arrangement suit you?"

Miriam sat quite silent for a minute. Large tears welled up in her eyes, and fell down on the blue cotton gown she wore. Then she said: "I think there must be a God."

TO THE STARS

"Why?" Gore asked, curious to have her answer. But she only shook her head; she either could not or would not reply; he did not press the question, but took out a pencil from his pocket and an envelope.

"Where shall I send the books to? Will you give me your full name and address?" he said. A world of difficulties flashed before Miriam at this question. What would her mother say? Only a few days ago she had heard Mr. Alan Gore denounced as a "free-thinker" by Mr. Hobbes; how would she permit books of his choosing to enter her house? But for this difficulty Miriam quickly invented a remedy. She had but one friend in Hindcup—to this friend's house the books must be sent.

"Will you please address the books to Miriam Sadler, The Old House, Hindcup?" she said; and Gore wrote down the address unsuspectingly. How could he guess that "The Old House" was not her home?

"Very well, then," he said, shutting up his pencil. "You shall have the books; take as much time as you please with them, and get all the help you can out of them, and don't be discouraged." He held out his hand to her, smiling his kind, interesting smile, and turned away.

Miriam watched till a bend of the path hid him from sight; then she rose from the stile and walked slowly off toward Hindcup. The refrain of one of the chapel hymns haunted her memory, with its lilting old tune:

"There is a better world they say,
Oh, so bright! Oh, so bright!"

"There is, indeed, with men like that in it," she said to herself bitterly.

THE LADDER

CHAPTER IV

YOU must now learn something about Miriam's only friend in Hindcup. Some ten years before this story begins, an elderly woman, Miss Geraldine Foxe, inherited considerable house property in Hindcup. She came, in consequence, to live there; but from her first settlement in the town, showed no inclination to be friendly with her neighbors. Their visits were not returned, and after a time the kindly ladies of Hindcup ceased ringing at Miss Foxe's door bell. She lived in a very old house—known for that reason as "The Old House"—which stood a little way out from the town on the Goodhampton Road. Its roof was covered with the moss of centuries, its garden was only a wilderness of tangled bushes, where with difficulty one could trace the hedges that had once been trim and clipped. Antiquarians who visited Hindcup often tried to gain access to the old house, but Miss Foxe would not allow it. She would not be disturbed by anyone. This mysterious-looking house had always had a curious attraction for Miriam. She used to go and gaze through the big, old, wrought-iron gate which was so seldom opened that its hinges were all rusted over, wondering what histories had gone on behind it. As children do, she exaggerated the glories of the old place, and in fancy saw kings and princesses wandering down the grass-grown paths under

TO THE STARS

the yew hedges. Then as she grew older, Miriam recognized that this was unlikely, and that even in its halcyon days The Old House could never have been magnificent; but she kept her love for it. She never passed the gate without pausing to look through it, and her childish wish to see the inside of the house was strong as ever. One evening, when Miriam was standing thus at the gate, Miss Foxe came toward it; the girl turned politely away but Miss Foxe called after her.

"Stop!" she said. "Tell me why you are looking in; I have seen you do it before though you have not seen me."

Miriam was rather annoyed, and a little alarmed.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," she said; "but ever since I was a child I have thought The Old House so beautiful and interesting, and liked to look at it."

"What do you mean by interesting?" Miss Foxe demanded. She had come close up to the gate, and spoke through the bars.

"I mean as if interesting, wonderful things had happened in it," Miriam said hesitatingly.

"What sort of things?"

"I am not sure, ma'am; but I think I could imagine."

Miss Foxe fitted the key into the gate and it creaked open.

"Come in," she said; "and call me 'Miss Foxe,' not 'ma'am,' for I see you are a girl of education. I want none of your 'ma'ams'; tell me your name and come in and see the house for yourself."

This had been the beginning of a friendship with

THE LADDER

Miss Foxe—a friendship which Mrs. Sadler was not quite ‘sure about,’ as she would have said herself, but which she permitted, because she was rather flattered that ‘a real lady,’ who had persistently refused the acquaintance of everyone in Hindcup should elect to make friends with her daughter.

Miss Foxe was a very eccentric woman, and if Mrs. Sadler had heard many of the things she said to Miriam there would have been a speedy end of the friendship. But the girl knew too well to mention any of these sayings before her mother. Miss Foxe was always urging the girl to emancipate herself in one direction or another; to leave home; to stop going to chapel; to have nothing to do with her cousins, if they were tiresome—counsels which Miriam had never acted upon, but which sunk into her mind none the less.

Miss Foxe was particularly vigorous in her denunciations of Miriam’s cousins:

“From your accounts of them, they seem to be quite impossible people; the sooner you break off from them the better. This tyranny of blood which exists in England is intolerable. Why should one consort with fools because they happen to have had the same grandfather as one’s self? I do not see it.”

Miriam had certainly been blessed with a goodly array of cousins. The Pillars seemed to populate half Hindcup; ramifications of the connection stretched everywhere. They were a strong, self-assertive, successful race. The men made their way in the world, got good situations, and earned money; the women were handsome and married well. It was traditional with them to do this; and if, as was sometimes neces-

TO THE STARS

sarily the case, one of them happened to make a less successful matrimonial venture than her cousins, it was also traditional with the family to deny the unsuccessful so strongly that the outside world in time came to take the match at their valuation. "It would never do," as they said, "to do anything else"; they liked that it should be acknowledged on all sides that "the Pillars married well."

It would be weariness itself to enumerate all Miriam's cousins; but the more important members of the connection bulked so largely in her life that you must know who and what they were.

Timothy Pillar, the eldest unmarried male cousin, was quite a feature of Hindcup society. He was a stout, high-colored young man, a "traveler" for table glass, and getting on well in his calling. He and Miriam were always at war—not openly, but perhaps all the more savagely for that very reason. She could not abide the horrid jokes on matrimony that he fired off at her whenever they met. Poor Timothy only meant to be pleasant and amusing; but Miriam did not see his jokes in this light. She did not get on very much better with his sister Maggie, the eldest married Pillar. Maggie was a buxom young woman, who had done her duty early in life by marrying the most rising lawyer in Hindcup. That was some ten years ago, and she had now a comfortable establishment, and a numerous and healthy progeny. She saw nothing beyond her house, her husband, and her children—nor ever would.

The second sister, Matilda, had not married quite so well—her husband was only a bank clerk; but the

THE LADDER

other members of the family had bolstered up his position to the outside world till James Marsden appeared more in the light of a bank director than anything else.

Two sisters still remained in the parental nest—Grace, who was undeniably getting elderly, and yet whom no one seemed to wish to marry, and Emmie, the youngest of the sisters, a pretty, fresh-complexioned girl, who spent her life in trimming hats for herself, and giggling over what she called her “admirers.” Hindcup had not yet given up hope of seeing Grace Pillar led to the altar, and as tales of Emmie’s conquests formed the major part of her married sisters’ conversation, the townspeople only waited to see what her choice would be.

Miriam, on her return from Miss Cumper’s School at Goodhampton, had naturally been expected to see a great deal of her cousins. But before very long her object in life was to see as little of them as possible. She did not care to hear about Emmie’s love affairs, she did not mind whether Grace married or did not marry, she took no interest in Maggie Broadman’s house, husband, or children, and cared less than nothing whether James Marsden got a raise of salary, and enabled Matilda to keep a second servant. This was all, no doubt, very unamiable in Miriam; but thus she was made. The Pillars, in their turn, held her in the utmost contempt; she had no love affairs, “nor was like to have,” as they said, and she was always saying queer things they did not understand. Because she was one of their family, however, the married Pillars (for a Pillar always seemed to remain a Pillar, some-

TO THE STARS

how) asked her to their houses; but it was only on sufferance, and they had little to say to her when she came. So relations were somewhat strained all round, and Maggie Broadman would say in a pitying way:

"If only some man would take a fancy to Miriam and marry her, I'm sure it would be a good thing; but there, it's not likely, I'm afraid; not that I would say so *out of the family*, it might be bad for Emmie and Grace. Nothing spoils a girl's chances like being thought to belong to a family that don't marry easily."

So, with a family loyalty that was positively noble, Mrs. Broadman would describe Miriam's unmarried state in far other terms to the outside world.

"You see, she is *very* particular," she would say, laughing, and shaking her head.

THE LADDER

CHAPTER V

THE well-married young Pillars confessed to each other (but never, never to outsiders) that their Aunt Pillar's position as housekeeper at Hindcup Manor was a trial to them. It was impossible to ignore the fact that powerful as her sway was at the Manor, she herself was a servant, albeit an upper one. By a sort of tacit consent, they never invited Aunt Pillar to their houses when they had company; but sometimes they allowed themselves an afternoon of fearful joy. One of the sisters would invite Aunt Pillar to her house on a day when no one else was likely to be there, and then (the other sisters assembling by prearrangement), in the seclusion of their dining room, they gossiped freely with her over the great people at the Manor—their doings, their visitors, their dresses.

With her nieces Aunt Pillar had positively no reserves; she would descend to the most petty detail imaginable—which of the ladies wore false hair; whether this one disposed of her old dresses, or gave them to her maid; whether that one gave out as many garments to be washed as another. All was grist to the mill of gossip; and sitting round the little dining table, elbows on board, the young women feasted on the scraps of information as eagerly as hounds on meat.

One afternoon, a few days after Miriam's meeting

TO THE STARS

with Alan Gore in the fields, Mrs. Marsden (née Matilda Pillar) had resolved upon one of these family gatherings.

Matilda had not quite such genteel visitors as her sister Maggie Broadman, so it was generally considered safer for her to be the hostess on these occasions when Aunt Pillar came to tea. Matilda (like all her sisters) was an excellent housekeeper, and the little party expected a delicious meal.

Aunt Pillar came in much heated from her walk up the street.

"Though I drove to the station in one of the carriages, my dears, and only walked up here," she explained. She untied her bonnet strings at once, on sitting down, and removed her black silk mantle, which Matilda took from her and carefully laid across the back of a chair.

"It's very kind of you to have made the exertion of coming over here in this heat," said Maggie Broadman, supplying her aunt with a footstool.

"Well, this is a very busy time at the Manor, of course, I won't deny; what with visitors coming and visitors going every hour of the day. But to be frank with you, my dears, I've something to *tell* you all," said Aunt Pillar. She took out her handkerchief and wiped her face all over, and seemed refreshed by the process. The four sisters drew nearer; Matilda only, in her capacity of hostess, suggested that this interesting bit of news should be delayed till they had had tea. "It was just coming," she said.

Aunt Pillar knew too well what a good cup of tea was, to suggest that it should be delayed.

THE LADDER

"You're right, Mattie," she said. "Tea is never the better for being overdrawn. Let us have it now. I'm in need of it; really, with the indoor life I lead, the least exertion out of doors throws me into such a perspiration." She had recourse again to her musk-scented handkerchief. Matilda hastened the tea, and after a good deal of quiet fussing they all got seated round the table and were supplied with brimming, steaming cups of tea.

Aunt Pillar took a taste of hers in a spoon.

"We couldn't do better than this at the Manor, Mattie," she said; "but I think I gave you the address of our tea merchant—he's very reliable."

"Yes, aunt; I always get five pounds of the black and one of Pekoe," Matilda began; but the other sisters broke in upon the housewifely talk, demanding to hear what the news might be.

"Well," Aunt Pillar began, looking all round the table to collect her audience, and have them well in hand before she got into her story—"well, it's Miriam Sadler again; I don't know what that girl's going to turn into at all."

There was a shout all round the table of, "She's going to be married! She's engaged!"

But Aunt Pillar smiled and shook her head.

"No, indeed; Miriam is little likely to do anything so sensible; but I must begin as far back as Sunday last. You'll remember it was a very hot day for the time of year. I had had a very busy morning seeing about the cold luncheon they had upstairs (I'll tell you all about it afterwards, Mattie—two *entrées* in aspic, and the lobster went high at the last minute, and

TO THE STARS

cook nearly in a fit with the heat, couldn't get her aspics to set); well, after all was over" (it is noticeable that Aunt Pillar always mentioned a meal in the same terms that other people employ for a more solemn event)—"when all was over, I was that exhausted I just sat down in my parlor and dropped over to sleep. I can't have been dozing for more than half an hour, when who should walk in but Miriam, blowzed with heat, poor girl, and looking very strange and excited. I was going to ask her for her mother and the rest of you, but she scarcely answered and just blurted out:

"'I've come to ask you to help me, aunt'; and really I was quite overset by her look as she said it."

The sisters almost stopped eating in their excitement, but urged Aunt Pillar to go on.

"I asked her what about? and she said '*Knowledge, learning, aunt; I want more education.*' Did you ever hear anything like it?"

"After two years with Miss Cumper!" said Maggie.

"Yes, indeed, what more would anyone want? Well, I just said, '*No, Miriam, you've had more than enough to ruin you.*' And I'm sure I spoke the truth. She gave me such a look as you never saw; and, as I sit here, she cried out: '*Aunt, it's life and hope I ask of you!*' Well, my dears, my own thought was she had had a touch of the sun, coming over the meadows in the heat, and I was alarmed at the thought. But as I was trying to collect myself, who should come in but Miss Eve Joyce and Mr. Alan Gore."

She paused to let this startling item sink well in. Her hearers held their breath.

"Mr. Gore, you know, is a wonderful distinguished

THE LADDER

man, unmarried yet, too, and I shouldn't wonder but he and Miss Eve made a match of it, though they're connections——"

But this was an unpardonable error in the storyteller's art; for it was as bad as drawing the proverbial red herring across the scent, to mention a possible marriage before the Pillars. Their attention was at once turned aside from the main heroine of the tale to this subordinate character.

"Oh, do you think so? Have they been going about much together? Tell us, Aunt Pillar," they exclaimed in a breath.

But Aunt Pillar was bent on reaching the climax of her story—she would not be drawn aside, but waived these questions, and went on:

"They had come to see the old lead cistern. I gave Miss Eve a chair, and she began to chat with me, and then I saw Miriam and Mr. Gore were talking together, quite interested, it seemed. I heard him saying a number of things to her that *I* couldn't understand, for I was talking to Miss Eve and listening to him, you see."

"Yes, exactly; go on," the sisters cried.

"Well, I couldn't make out what they were saying, but to make a long story short, they must have got very intimate in those few minutes, for what was my surprise yesterday to have *another* call from Mr. Gore—alone this time—and it was to ask me about 'my niece, Miriam Sadler,' if you please!"

"Never!" they ejaculated. "What did he wish to know about her?"

"Her circumstances, no less. Was she badly off?"

TO THE STARS

Where had she been educated? Was her father alive? A great many questions, I can assure you, and ended with, 'You have a very remarkable young relative, Mrs. Pillar, and you may live to be very proud of her some day.' 'I am sure, sir,' says I, 'I'll be glad and thankful if I don't live to be ashamed of her.' It seems he had met her again in the fields on Wednesday evening, and—"here Aunt Pillar leaned across the table, and whispered the words—"and she had asked him to give her some books!"

There was a pause, followed by a babel of exclamation: "She's crazy! She's demented! She's a shameless, impudent girl! What will Aunt Sadler say! Is he going to send the books?"

"Well, as to that, he said he was very pleased to be able to help her, and was going to send her the books whenever he got home. But what your Aunt Sadler will say I don't know, for Mr. Gore has the name of being very easy in his beliefs——"

This was all that was needed to give a climax to the thrilling story.

"And Aunt Sadler such a leading member with Mr. Hobbes! No doubt but Miriam has taken up strange views, too. I always thought there was something very peculiar about her," said Maggie.

"We'll see what we'll see," said Aunt Pillar; a safe prophecy which had a sound of wisdom in it. She leaned back in her chair and begged for another cup of Matilda's excellent tea, while the sisters rained comments on the story, and reviewed it in all its possible and impossible bearings.

THE LADDER

CHAPTER VI

MIRIAM felt the consequences of the cousinly conclave next afternoon. Maggie Broadman had been in to see Mrs. Sadler in the morning, and had sown the seeds of difficulty. Mrs. Sadler never approached any subject directly, she had not enough character to do so, but started weakly at some point far off in her mental horizon, and slowly directed her conversation onward from that point to the one she wished to reach. So this afternoon she began in her hesitating way:

"Miriam, I've been reading a very sad article in the *Methodist Recorder* on 'Some Books of the Day'; I wish you would read it."

"Which books is it about?" Miriam asked. She had a deep distrust of the *Methodist Recorder*.

"Oh, my dear, I forget the names of the books; but it was more the tendencies of the day," said Mrs. Sadler, picking nervously at her work.

"Well?" said Miriam. She could not imagine what her mother was driving at.

"It said there were so many atheistical works just now. I'm sure they shouldn't be allowed to be printed."

"But you see, mother, that would scarcely do; it would infringe the liberty of the press," the girl suggested. Mrs. Sadler shook her head; such general

TO THE STARS

principles as the liberty of the subject and of the press did not appeal to her.

"I do hope they won't ever come your way," she said, with an anxious look at her daughter.

A fear shot suddenly through Miriam's mind; was it possible that her mother had somehow heard about Mr. Gore's offer of the books?

Mrs. Sadler was really a little in awe of her daughter; already she felt the stress of a stronger nature contending with her own at many points. She rose up in a flutter, letting her work fall to the floor, and found strength to speak directly at last.

"Maggie Broadman came to me with such a story this morning, that it's quite upset me. It seems Aunt Pillar was in to see her yesterday, and told her that that freethinking Mr. Gore, who is at the Manor, has been speaking to you, and offering you books—or you asked him for them—and I can't believe it, that you should do such a thing."

"Yes," said Miriam. "I did ask him for the books, and he did say that he would send them to me."

"Oh, my dear! and him a freethinker! But maybe he won't send them; at least, if he does, you must send them back unread, and not defile your mind with them."

"In the first place," Miriam began, "perhaps you are quite wrong to call Mr. Gore a freethinker; and in the second place the books I asked for are not on these subjects. I asked him for poems and histories and novels."

"And what would any sensible girl do reading poems of a morning, or of an afternoon either, for

THE LADDER

that matter? Surely you learnt all the history you want to know at Miss Cumper's, and we all know what novels are—just lies.”

It was hopeless to argue with such an antagonist. Miriam sat silent, and her mother went on:

“I just hope he will forget all about them; these busy men often make promises and forget them. Mr. Hobbes says that offers of this kind have to do with the Elections always, though how *you* could have to do with the Elections I don't see; but Mr. Hobbes says they get into the habit of making promises.”

“Perhaps that was it,” said Miriam, with a lurking smile about the corners of her mouth. She was anxious to end the subject, and decided that, after this, complete silence about the books must be maintained. She knew that when the books failed to appear, her mother would conclude that Mr. Gore's promise had, whether owing to the Elections or not, been an empty one; and she must be allowed to believe this. It would never occur to Mrs. Sadler for a moment that Miriam had given another address for the books to be sent to; she was safe to receive and read them in comfort. Only how had Maggie Broadman heard anything about them? Aunt Pillar must have seen Mr. Gore. Well, Miriam decided, she would not trouble herself more about that.

She got up and left the room to signify that the subject was at an end between them, and went upstairs to her own room, a little dormer-window chamber looking out upon the street. A tree grew in the garden below, and its topmost boughs swept against the sill of the window. The tender green leaves of early

TO THE STARS

summer had burst through their enclosing sheaths just now, soft and fresh; but Miriam noticed that one of the branches was growing too near the house, and whenever a breath of wind came, the young leaves were cruelly scraped against the rough brick wall. She stood watching this, and thought how like her own life it was—every shoot she put out toward the sky got bruised by some hard wall of circumstance.

This may have been rather a morbid thought for a young creature to indulge in; but it was true enough. Miriam's nature turned with passionate eagerness to the things of the intellect; she thirsted for knowledge with a thirst that was almost pain. She wanted to know, so that she might express; but as yet she was unaware that this was the reason of her longing for knowledge. In her present environment, there was about as much chance of satisfying these longings as if she had been in the Desert of Sahara.

By her unlikeness to themselves, she had alienated all her relatives; not even the mother that bore her knew what Miriam felt on any subject.

Sometimes, in a sudden girlish craving for companionship, she would try, awkwardly, to throw herself into the interests of the young people about her. But half an hour of their talk sent her home with a baffled sense of defeat. After all, perhaps they had the right of it, she would say to herself—with their flirtations and their petty quarrels and pettier friendships; they at least seemed to enjoy life, which was more than she did, and they would marry and have husbands and children of their own before long, and that actually *was* life, wasn't it? while she— And then Miriam

THE LADDER

would smile, and look up to the sky with a sudden quickening at her heart.

Not for her were these aims, these satisfactions. Would it ever satisfy her, make life worth living for her, that young Dr. Pratt should admire her? Yet this seemed to give Emmie Pillar a satisfaction that "Heaven itself is powerless to bestow." No; not even the life-long and whole-souled affection of such a man as Dr. Pratt could ever please her. "*Oh, I'm all wrong somewhere,*" she would cry out to herself. "I wish I could feel like other girls! Emmie is so pleased with Dr. Pratt's attentions, and Grace, though she hasn't any admirers, was as pleased as possible all last week because Maggie brought her a new dress from London!"

This afternoon Miriam sat looking out at the window for a long time and thought very deeply. Then she took out a little blank book and a pencil and began to write down her thoughts. This is what she wrote:

"I wish to enter into life profoundly, tasting the best, the deepest, it has to give. How am I to do this?"

She put the date beneath this aspiring sentence, and sat down again to think. How, indeed, was she to taste the best life had to offer; and what was that, in the first place? She almost involuntarily took up her pencil again to write down her thoughts—it seemed to give them coherence.

"I wonder what the best of life really is? I suppose it is different for each person. Emmie's best of life would not be mine. Hers would be to be admired by a great lot of young men, whether she cared for

TO THE STARS

them or not; then to marry one of them, and live in a house furnished very handsomely, and wear expensive clothes, much finer than the other women she knows could afford. She would put on these fine things and go out to call on her poorer neighbors in them, and be delighted by their admiration.

"I have never been admired; men don't like me; so I do not know if that would please me much. I do not think it would. But, oh, I do desire to find one person who quite understands me, and whom I understand; just now I am going through the world alone.

"Life just now consists of this for me: in the morning I do housework and cooking; and in the afternoon mother likes me to sit and sew with her, but I generally go out; then I get alone for an hour or two and can think interesting thoughts. But when I come in, I perhaps find Mrs. Hobbes at tea with mother, and they talk about the price of meat, or how Mrs. Hobbes's little servant won't rise in the morning.

"Or perhaps it is one of the Pillar girls who has come in, and she will talk about nothing but clothes, or young men. Then in the evening mother sews again, and talks, or takes me out with her to an evening meeting of the Christian Institute; and so life is lived, or what is called life here. Can I mend it? Can I make anything out of it? I cannot leave home, as Miss Foxe urges me to do, because I have no good excuse for doing so. Mother is kind and means well by me, and we have enough to live upon without my earning anything. Oh, what am I going to do?"

The pencil fell from Miriam's fingers, and she hid her face in her hands in one of those agonies of help-

THE LADDER

lessness, of impotence against Fate, that Youth is prone to. After a little she looked up and wrote another sentence into her book.

"I must put something into my life; for there is nothing in it! What shall it be?"

There rose in her troubled mind one word that seemed to have some comfort in it—Effort. Let her attempt something, whatever it was, however futile the results might be. Better to try and fail even, than not to try at all. But she must struggle and agonize by herself, without a soul to help her or to understand what she was striving after. How she envied Emmie Pillar her preoccupation with dress and men. "If I only could want something *possible*," she cried. But she could not, and that was the end of the matter; she was predestined to attempt the unattainable and desire the impossible, and she had better make up her mind that it would always be thus with her.

TO THE STARS

CHAPTER VII

IT occurred to Miriam the next afternoon that she should go and warn Miss Foxe of the possible arrival of a box of books at The Old House. Mrs. Sadler entered her usual feeble protest against this afternoon walk.

"You would be far better sewing, my dear; Mrs. Hobbes is very anxious for more workers at her guild; she says there's scarcely a young woman nowadays can cut out and make a flannel petticoat. I felt quite ashamed that such a thing should be said of my daughter, for I was always a good needlewoman myself. I don't know where you got your dislike for your needle; won't you just stay in this afternoon, and show Mrs. Hobbes you can do it?"

If Miriam had been better than she was, this pathetic appeal must have touched her heart; but, alas, it did not.

"Oh, mother, I can't stay in and sew flannel petticoats to-day," she cried impatiently; and Mrs. Sadler gave a disheartened little sigh, and said no more.

The walk to The Old House was a very pleasant one—away from the town; and the irritations of home life seemed to fall off from the girl as she walked along. Miriam loved even the curious fusty smell which hung about The Old House; it seemed to breathe something uncommon and unlike the rest of Hindcup; it was really

THE LADDER

the smell of damp, and old furniture, but she did not believe this. A dark, steep stair led up to the drawing-room, and as she came up it, the drawing-room door opened and a man went into the next room. A man was not a common sight in Miss Foxe's house, and Miriam could not think who he could be. She hesitated whether to go in or not; but the maid assured her that Miss Foxe was quite able to see her, so she went on.

The old lady gave the girl her usual welcome, and said it was too long since she had been there.

"What have you been doing? Has anything been wrong with you?" she asked.

There and then Miriam poured out the whole story of the books, Miss Foxe nodding and smiling at every pause in the narrative.

"Quite right, quite right. I suppose most old people would say you were quite wrong, but I don't; you have done quite wisely."

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" Miriam cried. She was so accustomed to an atmosphere of disapproval, that Miss Foxe's words warmed her like sunshine.

"Then you don't think I was wrong, and I may come and read here every day, if the books come?"

"Every day, as long as you please. Though, of course, your mother will wonder why you come here; it will have to be done openly before long." This difficulty had not occurred to Miriam. "I could keep the books here, and take them to read at home one by one," she suggested.

"Yes, till your mother found you reading them at home."

TO THE STARS

"And then?"

"Then, as I have always told you, you must remind your mother that you are of a reasonable age, and must be allowed to exercise your reason; but delay this scene as long as you can—try gentle measures."

In the meantime the books had not yet arrived, and there was time to consider the subject carefully; so Miss Foxe thought she might introduce another topic.

"Max Courteis is here—my nephew—I'll send for him. I want him to see you," she said.

"I have heard you speak about him," said Miriam. "Is he not very clever? He has something to do with writing, has he not?"

"Yes, with other people's writing; that's why I wish him to see you. He can sample talent as some men can sample tea or wine. It is his profession; he has a special talent for it—a special insight. To be quite frank with you, I asked him down here very much because of you."

"O Miss Foxe!"

"I thought he might assist you. Don't be afraid of him, or mind his absent manner, or his bullying manner; he has both, and I cannot say which he will assume to you, most likely the absent one, unless he takes a sudden liking for you." Miriam shook in her shoes; she did not feel equal to meeting such a formidable person.

Miss Foxe went into the next room, and through the open door came the sound of her voice and that of the man she spoke to, though what they said was inaudible. In a few minutes she returned, bringing her nephew with her. Max Courteis was a tall, gray-

THE LADDER

haired man, who came in looking as if he did not know where he was going. He did not seem to direct his course toward any special chair, or, indeed, to see anything in the room, but sat down in a haphazard kind of way on the first seat that presented itself.

What then was Miriam's surprise, almost terror, a minute later, to look up and find herself the subject of a scrutiny the most intense she had ever undergone. She started in alarm, but the next minute Mr. Courteis seemed to be looking blankly at the opposite wall, as if he did not know she was in existence.

"I came down to the country for solitude," he said abruptly, "and now my aunt brings me in here to talk to you."

Miriam looked up. "I have nothing to talk with you about," she said gravely. "I know nothing about anything."

Courteis turned quickly at her words and looked at her again.

"I wonder who does know anything?" he said in an amused voice.

"I think that a number of learned people know about things," she ventured to say.

"Learning?" said Courteis, with inexpressible contempt in his voice. "What does learning matter? Ideas are the rub."

"Do not ideas spring from learning?" Miriam asked timidly.

Courteis jumped up and began to walk about the room in his blundering way, as if he would knock down the furniture.

"O Lord!" he said, with a sudden laugh.

TO THE STARS

"Ideas spring from learning! It's evident you have met few learned persons!"

Miriam was a little rebuffed by his rough manner; she shrank up into herself.

"I have met none at all," she said.

"Well, take my advice, and avoid them like the plague; they are the very death of originality," he replied.

"I had supposed it was quite the other way," said Miriam. She became primmer and expressed herself in more stilted language, as she was more frightened by Courteis's manner.

"Well, then, you were quite wrong," he said, pausing beside her chair; he seemed to be looking out at the window, not at her, so Miriam found courage to say, with her funny little lurking smile at the corners of her mouth, that Hindcup should be a very original place, by his showing.

"No doubt it is; we are all getting rubbed down to hateful uniformity in towns," he said; "you, for instance, would never grow in London. When would a town young woman say she knew nothing, and want to be in the society of learned people? Oh, no; you get fine fresh stuff in the provinces."

Miriam was really amused now; she laughed naturally and heartily, and forgot to feel afraid.

"You should come and live in Hindcup, Mr. Courteis," she said. "I think it would very soon cure you of these ideas."

"I am going to do something for my nephew's sake that I have not done for years," said Miss Foxe, who had listened to their conversation with some amuse-

THE LADDER

ment. "I am going to take him to the *fête* at Hindcup Manor next week."

"Why do you wish to go there?" Miriam asked. "I always find these *fêtes* so painful."

"Ah, you see them the right way, then," said Courteis. "Of course they are painful—painful and ridiculous. One class making believe to be friendly with another for one day, and all for its own ends. I want to see it for ends of my own, too, you may be sure. You are going, Miss Sadler?"

"Oh, yes, of course I am," said Miriam, with an earnestness that surprised her hearers. She rose suddenly, and held out her hand to Miss Foxe, saying she must be home before six o'clock.

"Why, it is not nearly six o'clock yet," Miss Foxe said. But Miriam seemed to wish to go, and no persuasions would make her change her mind.

TO THE STARS

CHAPTER VIII

MIRIAM found her mother talking with Mrs. Hobbes on this very subject of the *fête* at the Manor, when she came home.

"Mrs. Hobbes has come in to arrange with us about Thursday," she said. "Mr. Hobbes has engaged a *char-à-bancs* for the choir, so that they may have a little music on the road, and they have two vacant seats, and Mr. Hobbes kindly says will we come with them?"

"Music on the road" was not a very attractive thought to Miriam. She was silent for a minute, wondering how to evade the unwelcome invitation.

"Don't you wish to go to the *fête* at all?" asked Mrs. Hobbes.

"Oh, yes, of course I wish to go," the girl exclaimed with the same surprising earnestness she had shown to Miss Foxe about the *fête*.

"Then surely we couldn't do better than go in the *char-à-bancs*," Mrs. Sadler pleaded. There was no possible escape, so it was agreed that in the *char-à-bancs* they would go. After all, Miriam thought, what would it matter—what would anything matter—if only she might catch a glimpse again of Mr. Alan Gore's face, or perhaps—if Heaven was kind—hear an echo of that golden voice!

"They say it will be a very fine affair this year," Mrs. Sadler pursued. "The band from Goodhamp-

THE LADDER

ton is to be there, and there are to be races for the youths, with prizes, and the gardens are to be open to the public, and tea in a tent for all—altogether very fine. I had it all from my sister, Susan Pillar.” Mrs. Sadler took her pleasures sadly, but she seemed to find a certain lackluster satisfaction in retailing all these items to Mrs. Hobbes.

“Dear me! It will be a great treat for us all, I’m sure,” said Mrs. Hobbes. “Then I’ll tell Mr. Hobbes it is all arranged that you and Miriam drive with the choir. Good night, Mrs. Sadler, I must be off; there’s a meeting this evening, you know, and supper still to get. Good night.”

The days rather lagged for Miriam till this Thursday of the *fête*. It broke bright and warm. For some days she had had to listen to all that Emmie and Grace Pillar had to say about their clothes for the occasion. “The question is, *is* it to be my blue toque, or the black straw with pink roses?” Emmie had said whenever they met. “*I* like the blue toque myself, but I’ve an idea—mind, it’s just an idea, but I have it—that *some one else* likes the straw with the roses. He gave me a pink rosebud, you remember, at the Flower Show last year. I have it still, though I wouldn’t have him know that for worlds.”

“O Emmie, do make up your mind one way or other!” Miriam said impatiently; and Emmie (truly) observed that her cousin was horridly unsympathetic. Miriam’s own toilet was of her usual, unsuccessful kind. She, alas, was the type of woman who invariably puts on the wrong hat, even if she happens to have hit upon the right dress. If she ever looked well—and

TO THE STARS

she occasionally did—it was entirely by accident. But to-day, I am forced to admit that her clothes were unfortunate.

The three miles to the Manor seemed very long—even enlivened by music—for the roads were dusty, and the *char-à-bancs* was not a luxurious vehicle. Although it was early in the day, the natives of Hindcup were already disporting themselves under the trees, waiting for their entertainers to appear. They stood about in groups, talking and laughing, and gaping at the smart uniforms of the bandsmen, who, in their turn, smiled at the vacant rustic faces, and thought themselves very fine. The well-to-do townspeople kept themselves a little apart from their poor neighbors, and affected a metropolitan indifference to the band. Miriam would rather have stayed among the working people—old cottage women in sunbonnets, and young women carrying babies, and laborers in their Sunday clothes; but Mrs. Sadler frowned upon such an idea.

“You must come over among your cousins, my dear,” she said. “See, there’s Maggie Broadman in the new dress she got down from London; she do look very well, I declare.”

As Miriam came across to where her cousins stood, Maggie openly exclaimed at her dowdy appearance.

“I do wish Miriam were not such a bad dresser!” she said. “No man will ever look at her—the way she throws on her things.”

“Good morning, Maggie,” said Miriam, and then, as usual, found she had nothing else she wanted to say. Just then, however, the band began to tune up,

THE LADDER

there was a stir among the village people, and in the distance Sir Samuel and Lady Joyce appeared with their friends. Had Sir Samuel Joyce been born a poor man, he would never have been respected by anyone, but as he happened to have many lands and much money, he had a great local reputation. It would have been impossible to find a less intelligent man, in many ways, yet he had his own little narrow ideas of the duties of a landlord toward his tenantry, and these he did his best to live up to. This annual business of the *fête* was one of these ideas. He thought it encouraged good feeling between the different classes.

As Sir Samuel and Lady Joyce came nearer, Maggie Broadman shook out the flounces of her new dress, and arranged herself to the best advantage; she did not really expect to be noticed personally by Lady Joyce, but she wished to be.

"Who is that gentleman with them? Who will he be, I wonder?" she whispered. "And that's Miss Eve Joyce, and I wonder who the other lady is, about the same age? Very stylishly dressed both of them. There's Sir Samuel stopping to speak to old Mrs. Clarke."

Something made Miriam move away from the vicinity of her cousin; she strolled over to where the children were playing, and stood leaning against a tree to watch their games.

As she stood there she saw Miss Foxe and her nephew coming across the park. They were speaking together, not to any of the townspeople. Courteis came up to her immediately.

TO THE STARS

"Isn't it delicious?" he asked; "this sort of thing that makes one squirm with joy at human absurdity. The poor so humbly pleased with the grand entertainment given them by the rich—the patronage of it all!"

Miriam looked up and smiled—her smile expressed a very complete understanding of the scene before them.

"You see it all, of course?" he said.

She was silent for a minute.

"See it!" she exclaimed suddenly. "I feel it, down to my fingers and toes!"

"Why don't you write it down, then?" said Courteis. He came close up to where she stood. Miriam started.

"I—write it?" she stammered.

"Yes, all about it—the truth that you see. I tell you what, if you do something *good*, I'll publish it in *The Advance Guard*—my magazine."

Miriam stood as still as Lot's wife, turned rigid it seemed by looking forward instead of looking back.

"I know nothing about it—about writing," she said at last.

"Look here," said Courteis. "Come and walk over there among the trees with me, and talk." Miriam obeyed him mechanically and he went on: "You don't know anything about writing; and nothing about life; you have to learn about both of them. But I know what's there, behind your eyes; good fresh stuff that hasn't been used before."

He paused, and Miriam interpolated:

THE LADDER

"Good provincial stuff." At which they both laughed.

"Yes, just so; well, the words will come right enough, and for methods—you have that for your puzzle—to invent one. Time and trouble will teach you the rest."

He walked on in silence for a little looking on the ground, and then added: "I had to be a very miserable man before I did anything, and most people find it the same way."

"Would happiness not do it?" she asked timidly. Her young heart wanted a pleasanter recipe for success than the one he had given her. Courteis considered for a little before he answered.

"Exquisite happiness will, sometimes—the kind that comes to about one man or woman in ten thousand. Most of us, you know, are content with makeshifts of joy—ecstasy is an unknown sensation to the vast majority of the world. I wonder why? If I had been at the making of things, I'd have done it differently; trained men by ecstasies of happiness, instead of by this time-honored method of exquisite misery. I expect it would have done quite as well, too; it's extremes of temperature that are needed to try us, and heat would have done as well as cold, surely."

He kicked a stone off the path and walked on in silence.

"I have had no extremes in my life; it has all been at one quite uninteresting temperature," said Miriam.

The man beside her laughed.

"As if you needed to tell me that!" he said contemptuously.

TO THE STARS

Miriam drew back into her shell in a moment; for nothing hurts inexperience so deeply as any recognition of it. Then, with a sudden rush of wounded pride, she exclaimed hotly:

"Perhaps I will astonish you all some day, in spite of my inexperience."

Courteis laughed aloud.

"Of course you will; that's to say, you won't surprise me in the least; but your own people won't know where it all comes from. But I won't be astonished; do you suppose I go about the country asking many young women to write for *The Advance Guard*?"

"I am so inexperienced," said Miriam, "that I might almost have thought that you did."

Already the sense that she was believed in had given her courage; a week ago she would have been incapable of this retort.

"Come, don't take anything I say amiss," said Courteis. "What I mean is only this, that you want to grow."

"Which of us, by taking thought, can add one cubit to his stature?" Miriam quoted. She walked along by his side, a tall, ill-dressed young woman, not lovable, not desirable, from the man's point of view, as Courteis tacitly and coarsely put it to himself; but with just something in everything she said that marked her as entirely different from other women.

"What will time make of her?" Courteis asked himself.

"Tell me something about your life?" he added aloud.

THE LADDER

"About my life, Mr. Courteis, there is nothing to tell. I live with my mother in an uninteresting little house at the corner of New Street—not even in the nice old part of Hindcup; we have one little servant, and enough of money to have comfortable food and clothes. Mother goes a great deal to chapel. I have a number of cousins in Hindcup, but I do not get on with them. I have no friends, except your aunt, Miss Foxe. I have been at a school at Goodhampton; but three years ago they said my education was finished, though I know nothing, so I came home. I have nothing to do in life."

"That sounds blank enough," said Courteis.

"Women are made for misery, I think," said Miriam bitterly. "Now, if I were a man, no one would expect me to live this wretched sort of life; I would be allowed to do and think and go where I pleased."

"The old story; well, I see how it is. I see how you live, deeply sunk in the social morass. I know the sort of thing perfectly. Now, what you have to find out is *all about it*. You have the temperament; that's to say, you can recognize your desperate situation, and not your own only, but that of all your class. The more you recognize it the better. Steep yourself in its limitations; try to imagine yourself into their state of mind; become as one of them, and then produce a picture of it all. Do you see?"

"Perhaps a little," said Miriam, with reserve; and Courteis went on:

"Arrived there—at the point of describing it all—you have yourself escaped, a case of 'Christian at

TO THE STARS

morning looks back into Hell,' or whatever the picture is."

Here was a new idea for Miriam, that her very fetters should be the instrument of her liberation! She drew a long breath of the most intense interest. Seeing this, Courteis went on:

"Then when you see more, you will understand the tragic difference between man and man, and between class and class."

"I know that already," she said.

"Well, so much the better. Write all you know, and nothing else, and you will be all right. Send it to me. I'm curious to see the sort of thing you will produce."

"But how do I begin?" she asked.

"Do you think I can give you a recipe for it? as if it were a pudding? I thought you were more intelligent, Miss Sadler."

Miriam folded her lips tightly. They walked on in silence.

"You see, I never mind about hurting the feelings of those I wish to help," said Courteis. "It's no use trying to help people if you are too tender of their feelings."

"How clever you are!" Miriam exclaimed in spite of herself. She felt, she thought, like a horse in the hands of a skillful driver.

"Yes, in that way I'm clever enough. I can get other people to do what I can't do myself. That's where my talent lies, that's how I've made *The Advance Guard* what it is. I picked up the men that write for it, like jewels out of the dust. I told them

THE LADDER

what they could do, and they have done it. I found them; now I have found you, I hope."

Miriam turned round and held out her hand suddenly to him. He took it, and shook it kindly enough, giving her one of those penetrating looks that terrified her.

"Good luck to you, Miss Sadler," he said. "I'll do what I can for you; but Fate and yourself will do more." To himself he added in his coarse, undeniable way:

"She's no good as a *woman*; yet—I wonder if she'll wake up soon!"

TO THE STARS

CHAPTER IX

As Miriam and Max Courteis stood there together, two people came walking toward them through the sun-dappled oak-glade.

"There is Lady Joyce," said Miriam; but she did not add, "and Mr. Alan Gore." She stepped aside a little awkwardly as they advanced.

Lady Joyce had decided to shake hands and smile whenever she met anyone that day; so she stopped and held out her hand to this girl, although she really had no idea who she was.

"You are one of my guests," she said, "but I am stupid enough to have forgotten your name."

Miriam was beginning to explain who she was, when Alan Gore anticipated her words:

"I can introduce you, Lady Joyce," he said. "This is Miriam Sadler, the niece of your Mrs. Pillar."

"Oh, really! Yes, how stupid I am," said Lady Joyce. She turned to speak to Courteis then, and Alan Gore greeted him as an old acquaintance. They had evidently met before. "You here, Courteis?" he said, with some surprise.

They all stood speaking together for a minute or two, and then Lady Joyce suggested they should walk on.

"I wonder if you will let me take Miriam Sadler into the house to see the Blake pictures?" said Gore, as they went down the path. "I was speaking to her

THE LADDER

about one of them the other day." He said this in a low voice, that neither Miriam nor Courteis could hear; they had fallen behind their entertainers.

"Oh, yes, you told me about the girl, I remember; do take her," said Lady Joyce. She turned round as she spoke, and said to Miriam:

"Would you care to see some Blake pictures we have? Mr. Gore tells me you are interested in these things."

"Yes, I should like it," she answered. She could not find words in which to express her pleasure adequately.

"I must go and look up my relative," said Courteis, smiling as he looked from one of the little group to the other. He turned off down a side path, and Lady Joyce went on toward the park. Miriam found herself walking alone with Alan Gore.

He wore no hat, and seemed to rejoice in the wind and the sunshine, as he walked unhurriedly along, apparently unconscious that the groups of townspeople they now began to meet were looking curiously at him and at his companion. She, poor girl, was far from unconscious of the scrutiny she underwent from her neighbors, and she blushed painfully as she saw that her cousin Matilda had observed them. Mr. Gore, however, sauntered along without any knowledge of the attention they excited, or, perhaps, she thought, a man like him was so accustomed to being looked at that he didn't mind it in the least.

They came at last to the front door of the Manor. Never had Miriam thought to enter by this sacred portal—how often she had hurried in by the back en-

TO THE STARS

trance, undreaming of such an honor as now was hers!

She glanced at her conductor, and wondered how he could be so indifferent to these splendors—the footmen at the door, the size and height of the hall, as they came in, the wealth of objects around them. Miriam held her breath in awe. The magnificent footmen looked at her inquiringly; she wanted to scurry past them, but Mr. Gore would not hasten the least bit for any of their staring. It seemed to her that it took about an hour for them to walk slowly down that hall with those two silent staring men looking at them and listening to them. For Mr. Gore talked on, without lowering his voice in the least, just as if he did not care whether the footmen heard or not. To be sure, it was only about Blake's pictures that he talked; but Miriam knew, if he did not, that the two men were wondering what on earth Mrs. Pillar's niece had to do with Blake's pictures, or what right she had to walk in at the front door along with Mr. Alan Gore.

This ordeal past, however, she gave herself up to the delights of observation. Thus the better world lived! She gazed at the rooms they passed through, taking in with pitiful quickness every detail of their arrangement.

In the library, Gore brought her a chair and went to get out the Blake drawings. These he laid on the table before her, and sitting down beside her, began to explain the strange imagery of the pictures.

As his explanation ended, a silence fell between them. Miriam was surprised to find herself breaking it.

THE LADDER

"Does it not seem hard that half the world should have access to all this, and the other half be shut out from it?" she asked.

Gore leaned back in his chair, looking straight at her with his kind, clever eyes.

"Yes, it does," he said frankly. "And then one remembers something that equalizes it. The men that make these splendid things—things like Blake's poems and pictures—*they* are the wonder, far more than what they produce; rich people may be able to buy pictures and books, but they can't buy the power to produce them. What sort of a world did Blake live in? A garret in London, no money to buy food, scarcely money to buy paints, *yet such men as he make our culture*; he had the something none of us can buy. There's the essential justice of things, that no one class can have the monopoly of genius, except," he added with a laugh, "except that rich men seldom or never have it, so the poor get the monopoly there!"

"Oh, do you think so?" said Miriam, deeply interested.

"I know it."

"But do circumstances—advantages—not make men?" she asked.

"Not half as much as men make their circumstances, it seems to me."

Miriam looked at him doubtfully. Did he not himself contradict what he asserted? Did he not stand there before her, a man who seemed the very flower of the human race, the product of inherited gifts and graces that were denied to men of meaner birth? She shook her head.

TO THE STARS

"I don't quite believe it, I am afraid," she said. Gore leaned forward with the eagerness of a born arguer.

"But you must not hold these views!" he exclaimed. "They are all wrong! Why, the gifts of fortune, all this for instance" (he indicated the beautiful room with its books and pictures), "these are all valuable in their way, of course; but what you want really to value is the brain behind it all; the brain that wrote the books and painted the pictures. Money collected them here, and holds them, but brain made them. Surely you would rather have the one than the other, rather be able to produce good work yourself than possess all the art treasures of the world?"

"I think possessing beautiful things like these would help one to produce good work," said Miriam, sticking to her guns.

"Indeed, I think it is only a hindrance," said Gore. "Much better not to have too many so-called advantages." He paused, wondering for a moment why he had been led into such an argument with this girl, who, after all, had never shown any capacity that he knew of for artistic production of any kind. But just as he was thinking this, Miriam exclaimed, as if she could not keep back the news any longer:

"Oh, sir, Mr. Gore, I have had something extraordinary happen to me. Mr. Courteis wishes me to write something for him."

She stopped then, half-ashamed of her sudden confidence, half-proud to have it to give.

"And I hope you are going to try?"

She shook her head.

THE LADDER

"I am almost afraid to try—it would disappoint me so sorely to fail, and how could I succeed?"

Gore rose and began to walk about the room. Miriam sat in silence, waiting for him to speak again. At last he came and sat down beside her again.

"Have you known Courteis for long?" he asked, and she thought she distinguished a note of coldness in his voice.

"Oh, no, I only saw him last week for the first time. His aunt, Miss Foxe, I have known for several years."

"You know he has offered you a wonderful chance, one of the chances that only come once or twice in life, sometimes not even that—" He hesitated, and then went on:

"But perhaps—shall I say certainly, you can't know what Courteis and his school are like—they will be strange company for you. Shall I explain? I take it that you have no one to advise you about such things."

"I have no one whose advice I respect to advise me; plenty of people whose advice I despise."

"Exactly. Therefore, I am going to speak. You must take this chance. It means failure to hold back from the leaps that come to us in life. But can you take care of yourself?"

"How?" Miriam asked.

"I mean this way: you are young, and, pardon me, for you acknowledge it yourself, ignorant of the world, and very clever, very unlike your age and the people you have lived among. If you begin to work for Courteis you will come under his influence, and he will try to get you to write like the men of his school. You don't know them, or their clever, detest-

TO THE STARS

able gospel. Quite different from the gospels you have been trained in, and therefore irresistibly attractive, probably. How will that be?"

"I wonder," said Miriam slowly. Gore noticed in all that she said a tendency to weigh the subject in hand. Most young women would have hazarded a conjecture at that moment; this girl merely said, "I wonder," and thought about it.

"When I get home," Gore proceeded, "I'll send you some back numbers of *The Advance Guard* to read. They are full of clever writing and clever ideas. I should like you to try to grasp the spirit of the paper—its intention—the sort of lines it goes on."

"I shall try," said Miriam.

"There will be a great deal in it you won't quite understand, I fancy—a lot that will shock you; a lot you will admire. I shall be curious to hear how it strikes you. Will you let me know? Don't think I am trying to discourage you—I am so glad for you."

He stood up and held out his hand to her, half in congratulation, half (she felt) to put an end to the interview. She rose, and stood there silent for a moment before she turned to go.

"There's your ladder to the stars that we spoke of. I told you there was none that would ever reach them; but you may be always climbing up," said Gore, as they shook hands.

"I feel afraid, after what you have told me about Mr. Courteis," she said.

"Afraid? Do you remember, '*O Soul, never strike sail to a fear*'? That precept carries one far!"

"Oh, who said that?" Miriam cried, her eyes filled

THE LADDER

with sudden tears—tears of delight that anyone should have said just what she wanted.

“Emerson said it, and you must practice it. Life is nothing without its risks. This is a big one for you, so you are bound to take it.”

“I do fear; but perhaps I shall not strike sail,” said Miriam. She glanced fearfully at the clock, afraid to think how long she had been there.

“I must go. My mother will be wondering where I am. Good-by, sir—Mr. Gore.”

“Good-by, and good success to you. I shall not forget the books,” he said. “But I must come back to the park also; see, we can come out through the window; it saves time.”

Miriam gave a sigh of relief. She would not need to run the gantlet of footmanly criticism again.

TO THE STARS

CHAPTER X

As Miriam came out again into the sunshine, it seemed to her that she came out into quite another world. Life had suddenly put on a new aspect for her. She had always been a close observer, but now there was some object in her observation; it was to be part of her business now; she could not observe too much.

A little group of Pillars stood together under one of the elm trees, and, as they caught sight of their cousin, they opened out and then gathered in round her, all exclaiming in different tones on the same subject:

"My goodness, Miriam! Where have you been all this time?"

"What can you have been about?"

"Were you in the house?"

Finally Maggie Broadman for the whole group:

"Who was that gentleman you walked across the lawn with? Surely, you hadn't the presumption to speak to him? We were all quite annoyed, and we tried to keep your mother from noticing it."

"That was Mr. Gore; he spoke to me," said Miriam curtly. It seemed sacrilege to her to mention his name before her cousins; but it could not be avoided.

"The well-known Mr. Gore? You don't mean it! Why, we thought that stout gentleman with the white

THE LADDER

waistcoat would be him; he looks far more important, somehow."

"What did he say to you?" Matilda questioned; but Maggie broke in:

"It's much more important to know what you said to him. I hope you said none of those silly, strange things you sometimes come out with?"

But Miriam could not be drawn into any details of her talk with Mr. Gore. She turned away to where the children were playing, and left her cousins to conjecture what they pleased.

"She's quite set up with all this notice," said one to the other.

Sports for the youth of the village had been instituted, and Miriam stood and watched the hot, over-excited lads as they gathered in a group, preparatory to being started by Sir Samuel. Her quick eye observed that what was such an exciting event for the boys was an intense boredom to their entertainer. Sir Samuel was visibly trying to assume an interest in the sports, which it was impossible that he felt.

"Come on, lads! Stop a moment—we must start fair! I back Hindcup! One, two, three—off!" he shouted with an assumption of eagerness that Miriam took in perfectly. She found herself imagining the relief of Sir Samuel and his wife when that day's geniality was over. After her late sight of the library, she could form a mental picture so vivid that she could have sworn to having really seen it. Sir Samuel would fling himself down into one of those beautiful leather-covered chairs and laugh over it all. Mr. Gore would be there also, and—but here Miriam checked

TO THE STARS

herself. She felt sure that whatever Mr. Gore said about the events of the day and the guests he had helped to entertain, he would not laugh at them.

"I think he would think it rather piteous," she thought.

The races were concluded, the prizes given, the speeches made, and at last the evening came. Mr. Hobbes had with difficulty collected the members of his choir, and packed them into the *char-à-bancs*. Soon would the day be over. Miriam shrank back into the corner of the carriage and thought over all it had meant to her. But her thoughts were interrupted by Mr. Hobbes's suggestion of some music to cheer the homeward way.

"Let us have 'Safe in the Arms,'" he said. "You, Matilda Pillar, with your fine voice shall lead."

So Matilda, in her shrill, ill-modulated voice, started the swinging melody. It was quickly taken up, and soon they were all singing away at the top of their voices. The vulgar, sensual melody delighted them. Dr. Pratt sat closer to Emmie Pillar in the dusk, and gave her hand a slight pressure; she did not seem to mind this, nor the fact that the rest of the party must have noticed the action.

"What a sweet, tender hymn it is, Mr. Hobbes," said Mrs. Sadler, wiping her eyes.

"A precious hymn—precious," he answered; "let us have the last verse once again, Matilda." And Matilda, nothing loath, sang the verse over again with great emphasis.

Miriam did not join in the singing, but she sat there, in the corner, watching them all like a lynx.

THE LADDER

She thought it was rather disgusting of Emmie and Dr. Pratt to go on that way.

"You are taking no part in the singing, Miriam," said Mr. Hobbes, leaning across the carriage to speak to her.

"No," she answered bluntly, and all looked at her.

"It is a pity not to join in," he persisted, and Miriam, goaded by his persistency, made retort:

"I don't, Mr. Hobbes, because I dislike the hymn."

"Tut, tut, tut!" went Mr. Hobbes, but he had the sense not to press the subject, and contented himself with asking Matilda to start "The Sweet By and By" instead. To this luscious tune they swung homeward; the very driver, as he whipped up his jaded old screws, roared away about the "sweet by and by."

Miriam sat apart and wondered at it all—all the men and women beside her, at herself, at this strange world.

Far away, through the dark woods, she saw the Manor lights shine out, and a wave of bitterness swept over her:

"Oh, if I were there—there and happy, not here and disgusted!" she thought. What she longed for was not the beautiful house and all its luxuries; but the greatest, most unattainable luxury in the world—the interchange of ideas.

There rang in her ears words that from childhood had seemed to her the most poignant in the whole Bible: "Ye shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God, *and ye yourselves cast out.*"

"That's it," she thought; "'ye yourselves cast out.'"

TO THE STARS

CHAPTER XI

MIRIAM went the next day to see Miss Foxe; she wished to tell her all the happenings of the *fête* day. But before she did this she found that Miss Foxe had a good deal to say about her nephew.

"Max—poor Max, has left me this morning," she said.

"Why do you call him 'poor'?" Miriam asked.

"Because he is unhappy, unhappy in his matrimonial ventures. 'A hot love cooling' is one of the saddest sights of this world. When I recall the ardors of his courtship, I tremble for human frailty, and wonder if love ever does endure."

Miriam was very much interested. She somehow had never thought of Courteis as a married man, or perhaps it would be truer to say that she had never thought whether he was married or not.

"Does he not care for his wife?" she asked.

Miss Foxe smiled.

"Oh, my dear, they live on these terms of icy indifference that are so much worse than good, warm dislike—so much worse for the character. It has turned all the good in poor Max into bad. He has no reserves with me, I hear a great deal from him. Let me give you a piece of advice, Miriam: watch men and women in their relation to each other, if you wish to see the strangest freaks of human nature.

THE LADDER

Men and women view the world according as their love affairs have been happy or unhappy. It's a great mistake, of course, being so personal, but apparently they can't avoid it. There is no optimist so blatant as your happily, successfully married man or woman; they just *can't be* persuaded that everything is not all right."

"Yes, I know," said Miriam. "I've noticed that."

"And conversely," Miss Foxe pursued, in a musing tone, "when a man has had his heart wounded, and all his affections thwarted, it inevitably coarsens or embitters him; generally the first. They don't believe in the reality of love. They think it all passion—a phase of youth that passes; and you may speak to them from June to January, you will never convince them that it is not so. Try, my dear, not to take these hopelessly individual views when your time comes."

"You have just said that it can't be avoided," laughed Miriam.

"Well, so it seems; anyhow, Max Courteis cannot avoid it—clever as he is. His whole philosophy of life is tinged by his own experience. He has collected a school of writers round him who think like him. I've sometimes asked him unkindly if they are all unhappily married, and what do you think he replied?"

"What?" Miriam asked in amusement.

"'No one is ever anything else, and if they think they are, it's only a fleeting illusion of sensual gratification!' That's his pose, you see; the soul left very much out of things, indeed; so make the best of this world while you may."

"Did Mr. Courteis tell you what he said to me?"

TO THE STARS

Miriam asked—the question that had been burning her lips all this time. She was as shy and yet as anxious to speak of this as a young mother of her coming child.

“Yes, he told me; but I had told him to say it to you, so it was no news to me. He knows nothing about you and your abilities; he took them at my valuation, and after seeing you. What are you going to do?”

“I am going to think and think for a long time, and study; and then when I have arranged my ideas a little, try to write.”

“And what are you going to study first?” asked the old lady.

“The books Mr. Gore sends me, and may I come here? I am going to speak to mother about it when I go home. There is no quiet in our house to read or write. Whenever I sit down to do either, mother comes in and interrupts me, or the servant wants me to show her about something, or one of my cousins looks in; it’s no use at all. I must come here to read.”

“Very well,” said Miss Foxe. “I shall be delighted to have you here; no one shall disturb you. I shall think about you this evening when you break it to your mother.”

“It will be very disagreeable to do.”

“Very; but the wars of independence have always been the most stirring ones in history, and generally the most successful. I’ve always thought that God prospered them.”

Miss Foxe very seldom made an allusion of this kind in her talk, and Miriam was surprised by it. She thought about it as she walked back to Hindcup, and

THE LADDER

wondered if what Miss Foxe had said was true. Would God, indeed, fight this battle with her? But no, she concluded, she had no right to claim the help of the Most High in her difficulties, if she did not ask it when things went well with her. "I must fight my own battles," she thought. The wholly unintelligent creed taught her in childhood had long ago been rejected by her strong young intellect, and as yet no other had taken its place with any definiteness. Sometimes, unknown to her mother, Miriam would slip into the parish church of Hindcup. There, where the faith and hope of centuries had grown, she felt herself nearer God; but no Divine Friend walked beside her through the every-day streets.

Mrs. Sadler and Mrs. Hobbes were standing together in closest converse at the gate when Miriam approached. They parted at sight of her, and Mrs. Hobbes hurried off down the street. Mrs. Sadler waited to meet her daughter, and they walked together up the little flower-bordered path that led from the gate to the door.

"Poor Mrs. Hobbes is that put out about her Susannah," the good woman began; "they've had a difference over some cold meat. It seems Mrs. Hobbes had laid it by for Mr. Hobbes's supper to-night, and Susannah had her young man in to supper last night and gave it to him; and then when Mrs. Hobbes asked, 'Where was the cold meat?' Susannah spoke up to her in the rudest way. I'm sure these girls are more worry than they're worth any day."

Mrs. Sadler became aware suddenly that her daughter was paying very scant attention to this thrilling

TO THE STARS

history of Susannah and the cold meat; she stopped her recounting in a grieved way, saying:

"But I always forget you don't take much interest in Mrs. Hobbes's troubles."

Miriam was stricken with shame; how horrible it was to be out of touch with her own home. She tried to atone for it by an elaborately feigned interest; but simple people like Mrs. Sadler are often less easily mollified than more subtle personalities; she would have none of this affected interest.

"No, no, my dear, I know you take no real interest in these things, so it's little use pretending to." The girl did not try to defend herself. She sat down and decided to speak at once about her proposed studies.

"Mother," she said, "I wish to speak to you about something."

"Well, I hope it is that you've changed your mind and decided to take that class in the Sunday school, after all," said Mrs. Sadler. Poor woman! She knew perfectly well, somewhere deep down in her heart, that it was no such happy decision that her daughter wished to announce, but she kept desperately hoping against this conviction.

"No, indeed! I am afraid you will think that I mean to separate myself more from this sort of thing—from Sunday schools and Young People's Institutes, and so on, for I have decided to devote my life to study just now."

Mrs. Sadler repeated the words vacantly. "'To devote your life to study!' Dear, dear! But, Miriam, what in all the world will you study?"

THE LADDER

"I wish to study history, first; and then literature and philosophy, perhaps."

"Philosophy!" echoed Mrs. Sadler. The word bore only a dangerous significance to her ears.

"I am going to begin by studying for three hours each day, from eleven till two," Miriam pursued; but here her mother broke in desperately:

"Eleven to two! the busiest hours in the day! And who is to dust this parlor, and help cook dinner?" she cried in indignation.

"I shall dust the parlor before eleven," said Miriam gravely; "and Joan must just manage to cook by herself."

"But Joan is no cook; you know for yourself she burned the joint to a cinder yesterday."

"Well, then, we must try to find some one who can cook; for I am not going to do it."

"But home is your first duty, surely?" argued Mrs. Sadler.

"If there were no one else to do the things that need to be done; but, mother, we can pay a servant to do them, and I am not going to spend my life cooking."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! how wrong and foolish," sobbed Mrs. Sadler. "And if it had been anything but *study*; if it had been you were getting married, now, like your cousins; but *study*! what good will study do you?"

"I believe if I were marrying the stupidest man in England you would make no difficulty about sparing me," said her daughter bitterly.

"No, indeed; 'tis the way of all flesh, is marriage; but study!"

TO THE STARS

Miriam laughed outright.

"Not of *all* flesh, mother; but perhaps you won't take so unkindly to my studies when you see that they do me no harm. I am going to study at Miss Foxe's house, because it is quieter. I have arranged it all with her."

"I should never have had that friendship with Miss Foxe," cried poor Mrs. Sadler. "She's a strange, godless woman, by all accounts. I've been a foolish mother, and now I have my punishment." She wiped her eyes and gave a sigh of very real distress.

Miriam knew that it was useless to try to convince her mother on any point. The reasoning faculty, which was her own strongest characteristic, had been strangely left out of Mrs. Sadler's composition.

"I'll get Mr. Hobbes to speak to you," she said. "Surely you will believe what he says?"

"No, mother. Mr. Hobbes does not see things as I see them. You must just let me take my own way about this. I am old enough now to choose what I wish to do with my life, and I am going to do it."

"Oh, Miriam, Miriam, that's no way for a young person to speak!" cried the mother.

Miriam, seeing the vanity of further argument, turned away, and left the room.

THE LADDER

CHAPTER XII

THAT evening, in the solitude of her own room, by the light of one candle, and trembling with excitement, Miriam wrote the following note:

DEAR SIR:

The conversation you had with me has given me many new ideas, which I wish to follow out if possible. Might I ask you to send me specially some histories of Democracy, and essays on the same subject to study? Do you not think it will be better for me to devote myself to one subject at a time, in case I should be in danger of being overwhelmed by too many ideas?

With apologies for addressing you,

I am,

Yours truly,

MIRIAM SADLER.

She wrote this letter three times over, and finally, despairing of making any improvement in its style, put it up and addressed it to Mr. Gore at the Manor. After the letter was posted, Miriam was, of course, assailed by torments of shame—how futile, how silly her suggestion had been! What a fool Mr. Gore would think her! She lay awake half the night worrying over what she had done, and terrified by her own audacity.

The subject which she had vaguely named "Democracy" swam before her brain continually. She

TO THE STARS

meant by Democracy far more than the bare word implied—"A form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people collectively," the dictionary defined the word; but to Miriam it meant much more than this. She wanted histories of liberations which, alas, have not yet been wrought—which probably never can be wrought. For though exceptional individuals rise above the restrictions of class, such exceptions only prove the rule that the majority must remain walled in and fettered by laws which they have not sufficient force to nullify. All this seemed unjust to the girl; she began to try to arrange her ideas on the subject, and, as untrained thinkers will, repeated and contradicted herself constantly. At last she tried to write down these chaotic thoughts. The first statements came glibly enough to her pen, and she read over the sentences which set them forth, with a thrill of pride. But, after a little more consideration, Miriam began to wonder if there was not another side to the case. This led to writing down a further set of statements exactly contrary to the first. Bewildered between these conflicting views of the same subject, she sat and made vacant scribbles with her pen across the large sheet of grocer's paper on which she had been writing. Then she had a sudden illumination.

"This is the process I wish to learn," she cried. "Between the two sides of an argument truth is born; this is how thinking is done. I must think out all that can be said on both sides of every question, and then find something that lies between them both."

It was a laborious process, and equally laborious was that first "Treatise on Democracy," which Miriam

THE LADDER

produced as the fruit of many days of toil. During the production of this effort, she was deaf and blind to the outer world; she seemed to herself to be walking about in a dream; she was, as Maggie Broadman put it, "*more intolerable than usual*," nor could any questioning from her cousins make her reveal the reason of her preoccupation.

But one afternoon there came a letter from Miss Foxe, inclosing a note from Alan Gore. It had, of course, been addressed to The Old House. Miriam read this letter in such a hurry that she scarcely took in its simple contents; then she reread it, experiencing a slight thrill of disappointment because it was so unremarkable.

DEAR MISS SADLER:

I think your suggestion excellent. It is always best to read about what interests us most. I have sent you to-day a number of books on Democracy, and shall be interested to hear how you get on with them.

Wishing you all success and pleasure in the work you are undertaking,

Yours truly,

ALAN GORE.

Miriam wasted no time on the way to The Old House that day. There she found the box of books waiting, sure enough, and oh, how she fell upon them! Each book bore the owner's name on the title-page, and this invested the volumes with a peculiar charm in her eyes. To see Miriam read a book was like seeing a hungry caterpillar fasten on a green leaf. In the time that an ordinary person would take to read a few chapters, she had read the book—rejecting the

TO THE STARS

unessential bits of it, and sucking up the gist of the work, in the way only your born reader can do. The great pile of books on Democracy would have dismayed most people, but she almost kissed them in her ecstasy of pleasure. Day by day the pile of unread volumes diminished, and the pile of read volumes increased; and in the same way every day added to the stores of information that she acquired about her chosen subject.

At the end of a month Miriam deliberately tore up the laborious "Treatise on Democracy," which had so absorbed and pleased her, and began to write it all over again. It never occurred to her to give up the attempt; but with increased knowledge her views had undergone further change, and the whole treatise must be rewritten. The delicious labor of this second undertaking was considerably more arduous than the labor of the first attempt had been.

She worked at it early and late; wrote and rewrote, till Mrs. Sadler, examining the items of the "Store Book," exclaimed fretfully over her daughter's reckless expenditure on ink.

"*Ink again*, Miriam, sevenpence for ink! as if the penny bottles weren't good enough; who's wanting blue-black at sevenpence?"

But at last the day came when Miriam felt that she had written her last word on Democracy. She took out the pile of manuscript from a drawer and fingered it lovingly. The treatise had been written out on coarse, yellowish grocer's paper; it would make a considerable parcel. Miriam found a bit of brown paper and some string, but it cost her a pang to think of tying up the

THE LADDER

parcel; she felt like a mother putting away her child into its coffin, and wanted to have another and yet another look at the work of her hands. When at last she had finished making up the parcel, and had addressed it to Max Courteis, she stood holding it irresolutely for a moment. She must take leave of this, the first fruits of her labor. With a sudden impulse, she caught up the parcel to her lips and gave the impassive brown paper surface a gentle kiss.

In imagination Miriam followed the fortunes of her manuscript from the time it left her hands till it reached the hands of Max Courteis. She then imagined his first glance over it; would he think it wretchedly bad, or wonderfully good? Sometimes she fancied the one, sometimes the other verdict. But at any rate she had to wait some time for it; for a fortnight she heard nothing. Then at last, one morning, as Miriam and Mrs. Sadler were at breakfast, the little servant girl came in with a letter between her finger and thumb, which she announced was for Miss Sadler.

Letters were not very frequent events in this quiet household, and Mrs. Sadler looked up in mild surprise at the announcement.

"It is about something I have been writing," Miriam explained.

"Something you have been writing!" echoed Mrs. Sadler. She laid down the sugar tongs which she had just lifted, and looked earnestly at her daughter, with a world of astonishment in her stupid face.

"Yes; nothing important," said Miriam. She laid the letter down unopened, and pretended to eat her

TO THE STARS

breakfast; but even Mrs. Sadler saw the absurdity of this pretense.

"Surely, you're going to read it, now it's there," she asked.

"Not just now, mother; I would rather have my breakfast," said Miriam. She could not bear to open the letter there and then, for if it contained bad news, how could she endure the pain of it before her mother? if good news, surely the first joy would be better tasted in solitude. But Mrs. Sadler was not at all pleased.

"Well, well," she muttered. "What with your studies in other people's houses, and your letters from no one knows who, that you won't read before your own mother, I don't know what's to become of you, I'm sure!"

There was no reply possible to this attack. So Miriam was silent and the meal ended uncomfortably. She then ran upstairs to her own room, locked the door, and sat down to read. The very handwriting of the address was interesting to her, the sprawling illegible characters had the curious stamp of education upon them, in spite of their illegibility. At first she found it difficult to make out the contents of the letter, for Courteis did not punctuate with anything save a series of dashes. But at last she puzzled it out:

The stuff, of course, is as good as possible; but O Lord! why choose to write a treatise on Democracy at this time of day? Hasn't the world heard as much about it as it wants to know? I can't publish it, because no one would read it—not if it were a hitherto unpublished Baconian Essay. Turn your excellent ideas into lighter channels—no, lighter channels would never suit your peculiar gifts. I won't dictate. Try again. You must

THE LADDER

make the world listen to your own kind of talking—somehow. You are far too logical for a woman; but it is a great gift. I dote on your "Treatise on Democracy" myself; it's only my readers that I don't sufficiently respect to try them with it. Where did you get all these ideas, and where did you learn to arrange them so formidably?

But still the work is useless to me—impossible; and I am sorry, but hope to have more and better work from you soon.

Yours faithfully,

MAX COURTEIS.

The manuscript was returned. Miriam sat down to think over the letter and decided that she was at once disappointed and pleased by it. She read it over and over and tried to suck all the sweetness possible from it, but the hard fact remained, that the manuscript had been sent back, "and all my work has been wasted," she thought. Then her better judgment reasserted itself, and she confessed that the toil had been pleasure, and must bring gain in the end.

"I wonder if Mr. Gore would read it if I sent it to him?" she thought; "it would show him better than anything else how carefully I have read his books." After all, Max Courteis was an excellent critic, and did he not say that he "doted" on the poor, returned "Treatise"? It could not be altogether contemptible.

So once more it was folded up and dispatched—this time to Mr. Gore—along with a stiff little note to tell him what Courteis had written about it.

Miriam was far more excited by this sending off than she had been by the other. It mattered more to her that Alan Gore should think well of her work than if

TO THE STARS

a dozen editors had praised it. She regarded him much as we poor earth dwellers regard some splendid planet blazing down from the utmost heavens upon our dark world.

In reality, it was far more important that she should gain approval from Courteis, but it did not seem so to her. As day after day passed, she became more and more impatient. She watched the postman as he came up the street, banging carelessly at the doors and handing letters into other houses—he always passed her door.

“Mr. Gore has thought my Treatise absurd, and has decided not to take any notice of it,” she thought disconsolately. And then one afternoon something happened all at once; something that was to mean all the world to her.

THE LADDER

CHAPTER XIII

It was Joan's "day out," so Miriam had been busy. She had just removed the tea things from the parlor, and Mrs. Sadler was beginning to wonder if it wasn't nearly time for her to put on her bonnet, as she was going out to the prayer meeting, when she saw a carriage stop at the gate, and an unknown lady come up to the door. She looked about her in an inquiring, perplexed way, and came hesitatingly up the path, as if not certain whether she had come to the right house.

Miriam went to the door, which stood open, and confronted the unknown visitor.

"Does Miss Sadler live here? There seems to be some mistake about her address," the stranger asked.

"I am Miss Sadler," said Miriam, wondering very much, indeed, who this might be.

"Then I must introduce myself. I am Mr. Gore's sister; he sent me to see you."

She hesitated, and looked at the girl curiously.

"Won't you come in?" said Miriam, her heart beating fast with pleasure; but what to say was the question. An overpowering shyness possessed her. She ushered her visitor into the parlor and drew forward a chair for her. Mrs. Sadler rose and courtesied to the newcomer, flurried and surprised.

"This is my mother," Miriam explained; "and mother, this is Miss Gore."

"I'm sure you're very kind, ma'am," Mrs. Sadler

TO THE STARS

began, though it was hard to say what she meant to thank Miss Gore for as yet. Miriam, in the meantime, was realizing that her mother was sure to find out about the books Mr. Gore had sent, and what would she say?

Miss Gore turned to Mrs. Sadler and explained the reason of her visit.

"My brother asked me to come and see your daughter," she began, "because he has been so much struck by the article she has written on Democracy, and he wished me to make her acquaintance. I am staying at Hindcup Manor."

Mrs. Sadler was entirely bewildered by this explanation. In the first place, who was the lady; then, who was the lady's brother; then, how had he heard about anything that her daughter chose to write, and what was this about an article on Democracy? Then she hastily gathered up the fragments of memory, remembering something Maggie Broadman had told her about Mr. Gore and Miriam and books; she had hoped that it was all nonsense, as no more had been heard about it; but this must be the same thing turning up again.

"I'm sure I scarcely know what to say," she exclaimed. "I suppose Miriam's been writing something, though I know nothing about it, and really I'm often anxious over these 'studies' she talks about. I don't know what she studies, I'm sure; but I think she might well be better employed."

This speech illuminated the whole situation to Delia Gore. She glanced from the mother to the daughter. Mrs. Sadler spoke hurriedly, in a sort of nervous vex-

THE LADDER

ation; Miriam sat and listened impassively, looking at her mother in a curiously impersonal way, as if she were saying, "She may say any folly she chooses; I am not responsible for it."

"Oh, you must not be anxious about your daughter's studies," Delia exclaimed, anxious to be a peacemaker. "My brother sent her only the best known books on the subject, books that could do no one any harm—only good."

There was an ominous silence.

"Miriam never told me about no books," said Mrs. Sadler, very sorrowfully and ungrammatically. Whenever she was agitated, Mrs. Sadler had a trick of doubling the negative—a trick she had conquered in calmer moments. Delia looked beseechingly at Miriam—she must explain the situation.

"My mother thinks study will 'unsettle' me, Miss Gore," Miriam said, "and keep me from leading what she thinks is a useful life; so I never told her that Mr. Gore had sent me books to study. I asked him to send them to the house of a friend. That is how it was."

"Oh, that's what it was," said Mrs. Sadler. "That's what all the study at Miss Foxe's has been!"

Delia Gore hastened to relieve the situation as well as she could.

"Well, Mrs. Sadler, your daughter has made the cleverest use out of all her reading," she said. "I am sure you would be pleased if you knew how much we admire her article on Democracy; it is so new—full of all manner of fresh views of such a well-worn subject."

TO THE STARS

"What good is it ever to do anyone?" Mrs. Sadler inquired, a question which Miss Gore did not go into, but opened fresh ground by her next remark.

"We wonder if you will allow your daughter to come and pay us a visit in London," she said. "It would be a great pleasure to us."

"Miriam visit you in London!" echoed Mrs. Sadler; "but Miriam's not a lady," she added in a flat way.

Delia Gore laid her hand for just a moment on the girl's knee; the touch seemed to convey a world of understanding. Then she turned again to Mrs. Sadler.

"Oh, please don't bring in these ideas at all," she said. "I want your daughter to come and stay with me, if she will, that is all."

This subversive woman was too much for Mrs. Sadler altogether. She rose, as she would have expressed it, "all in a flurry."

"I'm sure, ma'am, I don't understand about Miriam. I don't understand the girl herself, though she's my own child; or what you all find in her, or what's to become of her. I'm just annoyed about her in every way. I'm sure, being a friend of her ladyship at the Manor, you mean kindly by her; but whatever would she do visiting with fine people like you?"

Miriam sat listening to this speech, with a curious smile on her lips. To Delia the scene was extremely painful. She had come wishing to give pleasure, and seemed to have done nothing but harm.

"Oh, we are not fine people in the least!" she cried. "We won't do any harm to your daughter—we wish

THE LADDER

to know her better, because we admire her powers of mind."

"Miriam's powers of mind!" echoed Mrs. Sadler. Often she had lamented over what she considered the hopeless stamp of her daughter's intellect. How frequently, for instance, she had been unable to follow Mr. Hobbes's more argumentative sermons in chapel, and had not been ashamed to say so. As a rule, mothers are apt to think too highly of the abilities of their offspring; but there are exceptions to every rule, and Mrs. Sadler was one of these. The dictum of the Pillar connection had always been that Miriam was "disappointing," and Mrs. Sadler had agreed in this verdict. Now from the lips of a stranger she heard the astonishing statement that her daughter had powers of mind; she could scarcely believe what she heard.

Things were then at this disagreeable pass when Mrs. Hobbes made her appearance coming up to the door. Never had Mrs. Hobbes been so sincerely welcomed before by Miriam. "Mother, there is Mrs. Hobbes coming to the door; she probably wishes to see you," she said. Mrs. Sadler did not need to hear this twice; she probably was feeling the situation difficult, also.

"I'll just go and see what she wants, if you'll excuse me," she said, rising, with an air of evident relief, to leave the room.

As the door closed, Miriam turned to her visitor.

"My mother cannot understand," she said slowly. "She does not understand me, or any of the things I am interested in."

TO THE STARS

"I see, I see," said Delia Gore quickly. "But you will come, will you not?" She hesitated a moment, and then added, "You won't have these stupid feelings about class, will you? We think it is possible to forget them—Alan and I—we like to know people for themselves, not for their circumstances."

Miriam had quite got over her momentary feeling of constraint with Miss Gore; something about her made her feel it easy to discuss even such a difficult subject as this was.

"I am sure what you say should be true," she said; "but if it were only a question of knowing people themselves, why don't you come and stay here with me? We would really know each other better that way; you know nothing at all about my kind of life, I suppose."

"Oh, how nice you are!" cried Delia, laughing. Miriam laughed, too, but she added:

"We should then require to talk all the time about books and ideas, because these would be the only things we had in common."

"You do go to the very root of things!" Delia exclaimed admiringly.

"I generally see the real truth about things, I think," Miriam admitted; "and that's the truth about this. I want to come and stay with you, and be friends with you, Miss Gore, but I wonder if such a friendship could be possible?"

"Well, will you come and try?" Delia persisted.

Miriam sat and thought in silence for a minute or two. She looked at Delia Gore, at her beautiful clothes, then down at her own dress. It was not even

THE LADDER

peculiar, just ordinary to the last degree—it spoke of class: not the dress of a working woman, not the dress of a lady—just midway between the two.

“I would have to come to you looking as I do to-day,” she said at last; “and that is quite different from you. I do not care about dress—I wish I did. I do not know what to wear, as women like you do.”

Delia Gore laughed again.

“The author of the ‘Treatise on Democracy’ should not have all these scruples,” she said.

Perhaps it was this final argument that won the day. At any rate, when Delia left the house a few minutes later, Miriam had promised to go to London and stay with her. Mrs. Sadler came back to the parlor and sank down into the armchair.

“I really don’t know what to say or think,” she said. “I’m so put about I’ve given up the prayer meeting. Whatever was this about your going to London to visit people you never saw before?”

Miriam drew her chair nearer to where her mother sat, and endeavored to make the whole thing plain to her. But even when she had grasped the facts of the case, Mrs. Sadler shook her head.

“I don’t know as I should let you think of it,” she said. “I must go over to the Manor to-morrow and see Aunt Pillar about it. I think a great deal of her advice, and she can tell me all about these Gores.”

Miriam said nothing. She knew that as her aunt decreed, for or against, so her fate would be decided. From a certain vulgar strength of character, Aunt Pillar had gained a great ascendancy over her relatives. Combined with this, her position at the Manor

TO THE STARS

had given her what her family considered a great knowledge of the world, and so her opinion was law with them all.

Aunt Pillar had, as she would have expressed it, "no opinion" of her niece Miriam. She considered her a failure—a woman not likely to marry, and not able to make a place for herself in the world without a husband. Once or twice, in a tentative sort of way, she had suggested that Miriam might be the better for having something to do, and had even hinted that it would be possible to "speak to her ladyship for her." But Miriam did not look upon Lady Joyce as the well-spring of all things, as Aunt Pillar did, and had received the suggestion coldly. She knew that the sort of position her aunt wanted her to get, would never satisfy her.

"I'll go over early to-morrow," Mrs. Sadler repeated; "but I scarcely think Aunt Pillar will approve of it."

"Very well, mother; but do you think it much matters whether she approves or not?" Miriam asked—an unfortunate question which only provoked the usual retort:

"Oh, dear! Whatever will you say next?"

THE LADDER

CHAPTER XIV

MRS. SADLER timed her visit to her sister better than Miriam had done on that hot and momentous Sunday afternoon when she first saw Mr. Alan Gore. Aunt Pillar's after-dinner nap was over, and she was therefore in a most amiable mood to receive visitors. Domestic matters had been going smoothly, too, at the Manor, so she greeted her sister very pleasantly.

"I'm glad to see you, Priscilla; come and sit down; it's not often I've a visit from you. I'll be having my tea directly," she said, drawing up a chair for her sister.

Mrs. Sadler sat down and threw off her mantle, exclaiming at the heat.

"I've come to consult you, Susan," she said then, with an air of great importance.

Aunt Pillar drew her chair closer to the table, and folded her fat hands on the bright magenta tablecloth in an attitude of attention.

"Well, and what may it be—not money matters, I hope? I warned you against them building societies years ago."

"No, no; not money matters at all; it's Miriam."

The family oracle pursed her lips with an air of extraordinary wisdom. She had surmised that ere long Miriam would "cause trouble."

"I'm not altogether surprised, Priscilla," she said.

TO THE STARS

"I've always considered her a strange girl—she's *unnatural*. I wish I saw her more like Jim's girls—see how well they are going off." (By this phrase Aunt Pillar signified marriage.) "But Miriam never seems to take up with any young men. She's too fond of books; I wouldn't allow it; you never have been firm enough with the girl."

Aunt Pillar shook her head, looking very grave indeed. She had decided not to trouble her sister with the story of Mr. Gore and the books; but now she wondered if any whisper of it had reached her.

"You say you wouldn't allow it, Susan; but the girl does it in spite of me. She's been what she calls 'studying' three hours every day of late."

"Come, now, I call that intolerable," said Aunt Pillar. She brought down her clinched hand on the table with a thump. "Quite intolerable. Study is just a luxury for rich people, like any other. If she wishes to work (but she doesn't), let her be a school-teacher and do work that will pay, work that there is some money in. I have no patience with such nonsense!"

"Well, but listen, Susan. This was bad enough; but didn't I find out yesterday that she's been *writing*?"

"*Writing!*" echoed Aunt Pillar. "What has she to write about? But I'll tell you what it is, Priscilla, the girl is very conceited. Things have come to my knowledge you would scarcely believe. I didn't mean to tell you; but now perhaps I should——"

"Is it about this Mr. Gore?" Mrs. Sadler asked, unable to restrain herself.

"That's it. So she has told you, has she? Two months ago she met him in this room, and that same

THE LADDER

week she had the presumption to speak to him on the road, and ask him to lend her books. I'll warrant she never told you *that*."

"O Susan, it can't be true; my girl surely would never be so forward!"

"As I understand, it was this way: Mr. Gore came to see me that same evening and asked most particularly about Miriam, your circumstances and altogether. But I've never heard since if he *sent* the books; that's another story."

"Yes, he did, but not to our house; they were sent to the house of that Miss Foxe that Miriam has made up with, and it's there she has been studying; and now *she has sent this that she wrote to Mr. Gore*."

"You don't say so! 'Tis downright disgraceful! Whatever can we do with the girl? And Mr. Gore such a fine gentleman, too; own cousin to her ladyship!"

"However did my Miriam think to do such a thing!" Mrs. Sadler moaned.

"Well, you shall have the truth, then," said Aunt Pillar; "and you may believe it or not, as you like. Hoskins, the butler, told me that on the *fête* day, Mr. Alan Gore *brought Miriam into the house by the front door, walked her through the hall and took her into the library*. There they were for close on half an hour, and Goodness alone knows what the girl was saying to him all that time. Now, that's gospel truth; Hoskins told me, and Hoskins had it from the footmen that saw them come in."

Mrs. Sadler was quite overcome by this bit of circumstantial evidence against her daughter. Dark conjectures flitted across her fancy. She leaned forward.

TO THE STARS

"What I want to know, Susan, is what sort of a gentleman may this Mr. Alan Gore be?"

"Why, a very fine gentleman, indeed, Priscilla. One of the Gores of Replands. You may see his name in the papers any day, too, speakin' here and speakin' there, and so much thought of. He's never here but there's a big dinner and half the county to meet him."

"That kind, I've often heard, are just the worst," said Mrs. Sadler; and then dropping her voice to a thrilling whisper she added, "for running after the women."

But here Aunt Pillar burst into a huge, unrestrained laugh.

"O Priscilla, Priscilla! you may keep your silly mind easy there! Mr. Alan Gore running after Miriam for bad ends! Oh, dear! oh, dear! Miriam that hasn't a beau in her own rank; the men never look at her. No, no, it's not that that troubles me, it's the presumption of the girl—set her up!"

Mrs. Sadler was hugely relieved. She had pictured Alan Gore to herself as a sort of Don Juan.

"Tell me, then, why does he take this interest in my Miriam?" she asked.

"Oh, I'll be bound she has made up some fine story to him about her love of study. Mr. Gore's great for education and philanthropy. That's how she caught him."

But Mrs. Sadler had reserved her best news to the end. She now produced it.

"Miss Gore, his sister, is at the Manor just now, I understand?"

THE LADDER

"Yes, Miss Delia; what about her?"

"Give me time, Susan. Well, she came to call at our house yesterday afternoon, and before she left she had it all arranged that *Miriam is to visit her in London.*"

The last clause of this sentence was whispered, and Mrs. Sadler cast a frightened glance round as she spoke.

Aunt Pillar made short work with this story.

"I don't believe it," she said; "and that's flat."

"Well, my dear, you may believe it or not, as you like, but my ears heard it, and my tongue's telling what I heard," retorted Mrs. Sadler, a little nettled by her sister's incredulity.

"Well, I never did! *Miriam* to visit with the Gores in London! Are you sure, Priscilla, that you made no mistake?"

"None whatever. They seemed to have it all arranged; but the question is, *is she to be allowed to go?*"

Aunt Pillar leaned back in her chair and folded her hands across her waist. She pushed out her under lip in an expression of deep deliberation, and sat silent for quite five minutes, till her sister cried out impatiently:

"Can't you give me an answer, Susan?"

"I'm just calculating back and forth," Aunt Pillar replied. "This you've told me has altered my ideas of the girl a good deal. You see, Priscilla, Mr. Gore's no ordinary man, and if he thinks so highly of the girl as to condescend to ask her to stay with them, why, it's plain he must see more in her than we see."

TO THE STARS

It may be the making of her in some way. Mr. Gore has influence, you see, in so many ways; but yet I can't see Miriam visiting at that house; why, the servants' suppers will be finer than the dinners she's used to at home!"

"Then, there's another thing," said Mrs. Sadler. "I've heard Mr. Gore spoken of as a freethinker. I fear at least he has very loose views on religion."

Aunt Pillar had not, however, the overreligiosity of her sister; in fact, she had more than once openly expostulated with her on her overstrict notions.

"You'll never get that girl off your hands, bringing her up so strict," she had said. So now she would not hear a word of this new difficulty.

"No, no. Mr. Alan Gore won't hurt your daughter," she said.

"Then you think she should go?"

"I think so, Priscilla. I think so, on the whole. Depend upon it, they have some scheme to help the girl. But I must say of all the ideas—Miriam to visit with the Gores! Well, well!"

Had Mrs. Sadler had a scrap of motherly pride in her nature, this openly expressed astonishment must have roused it, but she had not. Miriam was the last sort of daughter she would have chosen to possess; their tastes were too radically different to meet at any point; she viewed her with more bewilderment than affection.

As Mrs. Sadler, a little later, rose to go, Aunt Pillar asked her to wait a minute. She went over to a writing table which stood in the window, and unlocking a drawer, took from it two five-pound notes.

THE LADDER

"Here, Priscilla," she said. "Put this in your purse, and give it to Miriam from me. Tell her I refused her money to spend on study; but this is different. Tell her to get a new dress and hat. A black cashmere with some beads would be quiet and dressy both. She'll need it. See, put these in your purse."

"I'm sure you're very kind, Susan. Miriam won't know what to say," the mother murmured, as she squeezed the notes into her purse. "I must be off now, and thank you for your advice and for this."

Aunt Pillar saw her sister to the door, and then returned to the parlor, there to marvel afresh over the visit that her niece was to pay to the Gores.

TO THE STARS

CHAPTER XV

MIRIAM stood looking round her bedroom in the Gores' London house. Her yellow tin trunk had been brought upstairs, and lay forlornly on the luggage stand, waiting to be unpacked. She felt very insignificant in the large room; a feeling of shy sadness came over her; had she come here to stay with these great, clever people, only to be mortified, and find out her own worthlessness?

Instead of unpacking the yellow trunk, she sat down and covered her face with her hands. There she sat, reviewing the position in which she found herself. Here she was, among people whose world was so different from her own, that she sometimes scarcely knew what they were talking about. The size of the house bewildered her, the servants frightened her; and above all, oh, how she longed to please her entertainers, to show them they had not been mistaken in her! What was the best way to face the situation, she wondered? Miriam took from her pocket that little blank book we have known her to write in before, and, after an interval of deep thought, wrote down the following resolutions:

I. To affect nothing:

- a. No knowledge of things I know nothing about, however ignorant I may appear; let me rather confess ignorance than pretend to knowledge I have not got.

THE LADDER

- b.* Of manners or customs of society that I am ignorant of.
- c.* Of people I know nothing of.

II. I resolve to be ashamed of neither

- a.* My class;
- b.* My poverty;
- c.* My opinions; nor
- d.* My clothes.

I think if I can keep these resolutions, sensible people need not be ashamed of me.

This extraordinary document she signed and dated.

Then she resolutely took out her keys and began to unpack the yellow trunk. Clothes always look their worst after a journey; and though Miriam had no quick eye for such details, the crushed, common-looking garments seemed worse to her than ever before.

She had one shabby hairbrush to lay upon the wide, beautiful toilet table; a thick cotton nightdress trimmed with Swiss embroidery to put out on the magnificent bed; a pink cotton dressing gown to hang beside it.

When all these paltry belongings had been disposed about the room, she looked round it and smiled and shook her head; they were not suited to such a place. Then the question of what to wear that evening came up to be considered. Miriam had no evening dress, only a high black gown of thin woolen stuff, or a prune-colored merino which had been a good deal worn. She found herself regretting the foolish pride which had made her refuse Emmie Pillar's kindly meant offer of her one evening gown ("the one Dr. Pratt had admired at the Smiths' little dance"). It

TO THE STARS

would have been much better than either of the two dresses she had to choose between now.

Finally, she put on the black stuff dress and went down in it; no one could have called her well-dressed as she came into the drawing-room. Delia Gore had not come down yet, but Mr. Gore was standing beside the window reading a newspaper. He threw it down and came to meet Miriam as she advanced rather timidly into the room. Yes, it was the same man she had met in Aunt Pillar's room, the same man she had spoken to in the Hindcup meadows—and here she was in his house as his guest.

"I am so glad to see you; I hope you had a comfortable journey from Hindcup?" he said. Miriam detected no least shade of class distinction in the way he spoke to her.

"I have come to be one of their world for a little," she thought, "and I am going to enjoy it, and forget these hateful feelings."

"I feel so strange in this large house," she said. "I have lived always in such a small one that the rooms seem too big for me—sort of empty. I wish to draw the furniture nearer together."

"Oh, but you will forget that in about an hour," said Gore, laughing. Delia came in then, and they went down to dinner. Miriam wondered again if she could keep her resolutions. At every turn she was tempted to break them. She hoped the servants—those magnificent creatures—did not think her a very strange visitor.

"How contemptible of me to think such things," she thought. "Of course the servants must know quite

THE LADDER

well the sort of person I am; everyone looks what they are, pretty nearly; if I wish to be thought better, I must become better; these things must be from inside." While she went on thinking these thoughts, she spoke of all manner of other things.

"I have asked Mr. and Mrs. Courteis to dinner to-morrow," Delia said. "Alan tells me he is a friend of yours."

It pleased the girl to think that she had even this slender link of connection with her entertainers, that it should be possible for them to ask any acquaintance of hers to dinner.

"I have never seen Mrs. Courteis; what is she like?" Miriam asked.

"Oh, exactly the sort of wife you would have thought Courteis would have avoided!" Alan Gore said, laughing. "Long ago she may have been attractive, but she certainly isn't so now. They entertain a great deal in a curious, haphazard kind of way; all the distinguished people that come to London pass through their house at one time or another, and Mrs. Courteis always amuses me by her mild toleration of them all. She is so accustomed to celebrities, she doesn't exert herself in the least for them—just, as I say, tolerates them!"

"We shall go there one evening, I expect," said Delia.

"Well, then, you must do your best to be stupid, Miss Sadler," said Alan Gore, "just for the sake of poor Mrs. Courteis; she is quite as bored by clever people as most of us are by the opposite."

"What else shall we do?" Miriam asked timidly,

TO THE STARS

after a little. "Remember, everything in your life is new to me."

"I shall take you to see Lallah Rhys. Don't you think, Alan, I should take her to see Lallah?"

"Do you fancy that sort of person?" Alan asked, and laughed again. "She's more than charming, of course, but are you interested in her vocation?"

"I don't know what it is," said Miriam, though it cost her a good deal to say in words.

"She acts; she is a very well-known actress just now," said Delia, without betraying any surprise at such strange ignorance.

"I should like to see her very much; it is always interesting to see new kinds of people," said Miriam.

"We shall go and see her act some night," said Delia. "And there's Herman, too; shall we go and hear Herman? Divine young man!" Again poor Miriam had to confess ignorance.

"Oh, he plays—plays the violin; a very wonderful creature. He is a friend of the Courteises, I believe; they know him among their other celebrities."

"I know nothing about music," said Miriam, and then, with a sudden impulse, she added: "*All* these things that you know about are sealed to me; isn't it dreadful? Can I ever make up for my ignorance?"

The servants had left the room, and the lights had been put down; it seemed easier to speak naturally now.

"I tell you it's a positive advantage," Alan Gore said; "you come to these things with such a fresh mind."

"It is an advantage I would be willing to forego,"

THE LADDER

said Miriam bitterly. "You can't imagine what it feels like not to know what other people are talking about; things that are so ordinary to them, the sort of common coin of the world. Now what can I talk about with you and Miss Gore? You do not know any of my friends, and I know none of yours. If I could talk about plays and music, and actors and composers and musicians as ordinary women of the world seem able to do, that would put everything right; but I cannot. It's like being left with no small change in your purse. The sovereigns may be more valuable, perhaps, but the shillings and sixpences are far more useful!"

Miriam's intensity of feeling had betrayed her into this long speech, and as she became aware how long it had been, she blushed and felt ashamed. Delia and Alan Gore were looking at her with grave interest, and when she stopped speaking, Alan made answer:

"I must carry on your own metaphor, Miss Sadler, and tell you to remember that you can always get sixpence for a sovereign, but I don't know any process by which you can get a sovereign for sixpence! So the one is a safer capital to start with than the other." Delia, with a woman's keen perceptions, agreed bluntly with Miriam.

"I understand *quite*," she said. "But, you know, it's all a sort of trick; you can learn it just as you might learn French or German—a great deal of it." But Miriam would not lay the flattering unction to her soul. She knew better.

When she went up to bed that night, it was certainly not to sleep. Fragments of conversation haunted her

TO THE STARS

memory, and every moment new and interesting channels of thought opened out for her. In the comparative quiet that falls between two and four in a London night, Miriam heard a far-off clock strike. To her country imagination it tolled out an unholy hour at which to be awake.

"I shall never get to sleep to-night," she thought, tossing on her soft pillows. The church clock at Hindcup would be striking the same hour at that moment. She seemed to hear its deep, tranquil note booming across the quiet country.

"I almost wish I was at home again," she thought. "Why did I come? I have so many wonderful, exciting things to do and see, and oh, how tired I am! How extraordinary to live a life like this; life must be more valuable lived this way; they are not all of the same value—the life of Mr. Hobbes and the life of Mr. Gore, for instance—in the sight of God? Yes, even in His sight—I wonder—four o'clock—there's the daylight."

She turned once on her pillow and slept at last.

THE LADDER

CHAPTER XVI

THE visit to Lallah Rhys was, as you will hear, a turning point in Miriam's life; she was not in when Delia and Miriam arrived, but had left a message that they were to wait for her. Delia sat down on a sofa and took up a magazine; but Miriam walked to the end of the room and stood there, taking in all its arrangements. She was still standing looking round her when the door opened and Lallah Rhys came in. With something of a stage manner, she made her entrance; a huge bouquet of lilies and roses in one hand, the other held out in welcome to Delia Gore. Lallah was at that time at the very zenith of her fame and beauty, her cup filled to the brim with the wine of life. Miriam held her breath to watch her cross the room. She tossed her bouquet down on a chair, and came toward the girl, holding out both hands to her with a beautiful, easy gesture of welcome.

"And this is the young woman who is going to set the Thames on fire!" she said. All at once, standing beside this radiant creature who held her hands and looked at her out of brilliant, wonderful eyes, Miriam understood her own failure as a woman; she was abashed.

"Come and sit down," Lallah said, drawing Miriam forward. She gave her visitors a seat one on each side of her on the sofa, and, still holding Miriam's hand, continued a stream of talk all the time.

TO THE STARS

"Yes, she had been opening a Bazaar for Cripple Children, that was where the bouquet came from; she had so many flowers she didn't know what to do with them; she wished people would get tired of giving bouquets to her; and yet, it was sweet of them, too, wasn't it?" As she spoke, Lallah would turn from one of her visitors to the other, with sudden, exquisite smiles and gestures that illuminated all she said.

Miriam's large somber eyes followed every movement of this lovely creature; she drank in every word she uttered. Then gravely, in the first pause that fell, she asked her:

"Have you a happy life? Does it satisfy you?"

Lallah flung herself back against the sofa cushions with a little cry of amusement.

"Do I find life satisfying? Why not, black eyes? Am I happy? Yes, yes, yes. I am young, and, they say, beautiful and successful. What more would mortal want?"

"It must be strange to be so beautiful," said Miriam. "Do you think a great deal about it?"

"Oh, I am accustomed—" Lallah began, and then, with a sudden turning of the tables she inquired: "And what are your pleasures?"

Miriam did not answer this question immediately. Then she said: "I have great pleasure in thought, and in looking at what is beautiful, but I do not suppose I have ever had what you call 'pleasure.'"

"You take life too seriously, my friend," Lallah assured her; "think too much and enjoy too little. Come into my room and see my new garments, which are beautiful to behold!"

THE LADDER

She sprang up as if to dismiss such seriousness, and led them into a room which opened off the one they were in. There Miriam was treated to a display of clothing such as her wildest dreams could not have imagined. Lallah lay back in a chair, calling to her maid to bring out the dresses one by one as they were wanted. Sometimes she would clap her hands like a child, in delight at the beauty of the dresses; sometimes she would pause and point out a defect in them. Delia was scarcely less ecstatic than the owner of the garments, but Miriam sat a silent witness of the display. Then suddenly Lallah jumped up and began to tear off her hat, and call distractedly to her maid:

"Effie, Effie! I shall be late! my blue dress, quick! Good-by, dear Delia. Good-by, Sombre One; come and see me act. I have some new stage gowns that would enchant you!" She began to whirl about the room, pulling out drawers and tumbling their contents, talking, laughing, and directing her maid all at once. Miriam and Delia hurried away, laughing also, and found their way downstairs.

"Well," Delia asked, as they gained the street, "what are your impressions?"

"I used to think that it was a hard fate to be a woman," Miriam answered; "but don't you think that a woman like that has probably had more in her life, take it all in all, than any man?—more joy, more gratification?"

"Yes, gratification is the word; she has certainly supped full on that," Delia admitted.

"I think I shall always thank you for letting me observe her," said Miriam. This glimpse of all that

TO THE STARS

a woman might be had indeed been a revelation to her; she pondered over it so long and deeply that Delia had to speak to her several times before she answered, and all that afternoon she was silent and preoccupied. At last when they were alone in the drawing-room she voiced her thoughts.

"Miss Gore," she said, "will you help me about something? I have been thinking——"

"I should say you had!" laughed Delia.

"I have been thinking. I see that dress and appearance are of more importance than I used to think they were. I had not realized it before. I thought only foolish women like my cousins were interested in it."

Delia burst into a peal of laughter.

"I know what has done this—Lallah Rhys!"

"Yes, exactly. I know I can never look pretty, because I am plain; but I wish to forget my appearance, and now I think about it because my clothes are all wrong somehow. Will you help me to buy the right kind?"

"Of course I will; but they take such a horrible amount of money."

"Aunt Pillar gave me ten pounds, and I have five pounds of my own that I can spend; what do I need most?"

Delia was too honest to try to dissemble on this point.

"Well, I think you do need a great deal," she said. "You need a morning dress and an evening dress, and a new hat, and new boots and shoes, and gloves, and how are you to get all that for fifteen pounds?"

THE LADDER

Miriam then began, with awful plainness of speech, to discuss her own appearance.

"My present dresses are not those of a lady," she said; "but do you not think it is more me than the clothes? If you were to put on my prune merino, now, Miss Gore, I believe you would look beautiful in it."

"No, I would not," said Delia bluntly. "No one could look beautiful in a prune merino. I would look much worse than you do; you wear it with a kind of simplicity and unconsciousness that robs it of half its terrors."

"I shall never be unconscious of it again," said poor Miriam. Then, after a moment's pause: "Everything I have is made too tightly, I see."

"Yes, that is bad making."

"And the black jacket I wear with my prune dress is all wrong, somehow—will you tell me *why*? Black is very quiet, surely, and the jacket is made plainly, then why does it look wrong? I think if I could find a reason why some clothes look better than others it would help me; but it seems so arbitrary."

She could not have appealed to anyone better fitted to advise her than Delia Gore, who was always well-dressed though she did not follow fashion blindly, as some women do. She sat down to the discussion of the problem in earnest, trying to find some reasonable basis for why one color or style looked better than another. Her listener was intensely absorbed in it all. There was nothing very original in the arguments Delia brought forward, but Miriam had never heard any of them before.

TO THE STARS

"Suitability," she said musingly. "Well, now, why are my clothes unsuitable just now?"

"Well, this is summer, and you are wearing thick, stuffy materials that won't wash, and never look fresh; therefore they are unsuitable for the season."

"Then why does my black cloth gown look so bad in the evening? Is it not suitable?"

"I think it looks bad because one feels you should be wearing something cooler in the evening, when the rooms are hot; something not made tight up to your chin, and down to your wrists!"

"I see; and then why would it be unsuitable for me to wear an evening dress at home?"

Delia hesitated and thought for a minute.

"Perhaps you might be doing some sort of work at home, clearing up supper, or something—wouldn't that seem to need another sort of dress?"

Yes, Miriam admitted; she began to see a little daylight through things, she thought; but minor points perplexed her.

"Why, Miss Gore, why are my shoes wrong? Why should toe-caps stitched in white, quite neat, firm toe-caps, make my shoes look so different from yours?"

But Delia broke down here; she could not produce any ethical reason why toe-caps stitched with white should be wrong.

"You must just sometimes come back to the point of admitting that things *are* wrong, though you can't possibly say why," she said. They entered then upon less abstract considerations, coming down to the question of how much could be got for fifteen pounds. Delia was fully more excited than Miriam; she got a

THE LADDER

sheet of paper and began to make calculations of an abstruse nature.

"It must be moderately cheap stuff well made," she announced at last. "I shall take you to my dressmaker—Hélène; you won't mind if I explain a little to her, will you? She is quite an understanding person. She will say she can't make the clothes for the money, but I shall make her do it."

"I shall mind very much," said Miriam; "but it must be done, I suppose."

It was a terrible thought to the poor girl, this of facing a fashionable dressmaker and having herself "explained" about. She determined, however, that she would go through with it, no matter how painful it might be.

"I won't stop till I look like other women on the outside," she said to herself, but the resolution cost her dear.

"You see, Miss Gore," she explained, "I used to think that nothing mattered except the things of the mind; now I see that everything matters, the whole includes the part. I must begin with outside things, after all."

But Delia would not let her say this.

"You don't do yourself justice when you say you must begin from the outside; it is because you have got the things of your mind right, that you now want the others adjusted, and they will come quite easily, I'm sure. You have such a nice sense of proportion and suitability."

Even with all the encouragement Delia could give, Miriam found it very painful to go to Hélène's and

TO THE STARS

confess that she wanted to be all put to rights. Delia was very practical; she went into the subject of expense down to the uttermost farthing, stating to the dressmaker exactly how much her friend could afford to pay. Then the usual protestations ensued: it was impossible to do it at that price; the dresses could not be satisfactory unless lined throughout with the richest silk; madame could not expect such a sacrifice to be made. But Delia was inflexible. It was quite possible to do them, and to do them well, and without silk linings, and there would be no sacrifice in the matter.

So the argument came and went till at last Hélène capitulated, and sent for the fitter.

O what a moment that was for Miriam when she stood under the coldly critical eye of Hélène and the fitter! Her poor, common garments seemed to shrivel up under their appraising survey. Then Hélène stepped forward and laid her hands firmly on Miriam's waist, feeling its line.

"Madame!" she exclaimed, turning to Delia; "madame! I cannot, no, I cannot; it is as much as my reputation is worth to try to turn out a satisfactory costume over a corset like that. Just stop a moment, Miss Jenner" (to the fitter) "we must go into the subject before we go any further!"

Such radical reforms had not suggested themselves to Miriam, though Delia had seen the difficulty looming ahead—she looked despairingly at her friend. "I must have new ones," she whispered. Delia nodded.

"You supply corsets, Hélène," she said, in her calm

THE LADDER

voice. "Please send for some and fit the lady before we go further."

Only a determination not to give in could have sustained Miriam through the ordeal that followed, when her simple undergarments were passed in review.

"What bodice could lie over *that*, madame?" Hélène inquired contemptuously; then, thinking she had gone too far in her contempt of Miss Gore's friend, she added: "And the young lady has good lines in her figure, too, if it had been rightly fitted."

"Very good," said Delia. But this was small consolation to the subject of these criticisms, who felt as if she were being skinned instead of undressed, and would have taken the first corset offered to her, with scarcely a thought of how it fitted. Delia, however, was not in a hurry. She sat back in her chair, smiling, and looking as if it all was the greatest fun, commending and disparaging, insisting that the fitting was to be perfect.

"There, now, that is just right; we shall have that pair, Hélène. Now, Miss Jenner, take the measures, please," she said. Miriam drew a tremendous sigh of relief when at last she was helped into her own garments again, and they left the shop. Her cheeks were burning, tears were not far from her eyes.

"O Miss Gore, that was terrible!" she exclaimed. But the words gave scant expression to all she felt. Delia looked at her in surprise.

"Shop people have such false standards about everything," she said. "I never know why we mind them; they only care whether our clothes have cost a certain amount, or whether we walk or come in a carriage to

TO THE STARS

the door. Why should we mind the opinion of people like that? I've often thought of inaugurating a Society for the Elevation of the Ideals of Shopwomen; don't you think it is needed?" So she tried to laugh away her friend's mortification. But Miriam shook her head; this afternoon's work had been no laughing matter to her.

THE LADDER

CHAPTER XVII

MR. and Mrs. Courteis were coming to dinner, and Miriam had no evening dress, for, of course, her new garments could not be made in a day. This question of clothes had suddenly assumed a pitiful importance in her eyes; she would have bartered all her intellectual powers, willingly, for that prosaic article, a handsome evening dress! Standing before the mirror in her room, she gazed at herself with feelings of despair. She tried the effect of turning down the collar of her dress to show her throat, and decided that this was "wrong." Then she took out a locket—a present from her mother on her twentieth birthday—and tried the effect of putting it on. The locket was large, coarsely gilded, and had a star of worthless pearls in the center—it only made matters worse. Miriam replaced the locket in its box, resolutely fastened up the collar of her black gown, and turned away from the glass, with tears in her eyes. "I must, I shall conquer these outside things," she thought; "but, oh, they do hurt!"

Mr. and Mrs. Courteis had arrived when she went downstairs. They were standing talking with Alan Gore. Delia, as usual, was late.

As she came across the room to where they stood, Miriam suffered a moment of acute misery. Tortured by the sudden knowledge of her unsuitable clothes, she would gladly have fled from the room instead of

TO THE STARS

coming forward to speak to these people. She glanced at Alan Gore, and something in his face seemed to reassure her. He understood, she felt sure, all the misery she was enduring.

She pulled herself together with a great effort, determined not to show what she suffered.

"I don't think that you and Mrs. Courteis have met?" Gore said; and Miriam found courage to look at Mrs. Courteis. The sight reassured her. This was no vision of fashion, only an elderly woman, carelessly dressed in a sloppy, black tea gown (a garment Miriam had never seen before, and did not admire). Her hair was very untidy, as if she had not taken the trouble to brush it before coming out, and she gave Miriam a lackluster stare that certainly did not express any surprise at her dress.

"I'm glad to meet you, Miss Sadler," she said in an apathetic voice. "Mr. Courteis has told me about you; you know Aunt Geraldine, I think, but I forget what you write."

Miriam breathed more freely; she had nothing to fear from the criticism of this woman, who looked as if a costume of paint and feathers would scarcely have surprised her out of her apathy.

But the feeling of relief was short-lived. For as as they sat down to dinner, Courteis began to speak about a public question which had, it appeared, incriminated several persons known to him and to the Gores, but, of course, unknown to Miriam. The kindest hosts will not hold back from such a topic because one of their guests cannot join in the conversation. Miriam must sit silent. They all seemed to forget her

THE LADDER

for a time; even Mrs. Courteis was roused to interest, and had plenty to say on the subject. "If I could even put in one intelligent word," she thought; but the intelligent word was not there to say. Suddenly Gore paused in the heat of the discussion and turned toward her.

"I'm afraid all this is not very interesting to you?" he said apologetically.

She wondered for a moment if she would pretend that it was. Then she remembered her resolutions against pretense of any kind.

"No," she answered. "I really don't know what you are talking about."

Delia and Courteis laughed, and Mrs. Courteis turned a languid eye on her; she had not enough humor to laugh at anything. As for Miriam, she more nearly cried at that moment.

"How tiresome it must be for them to feel they must talk about the few things I understand," she thought. "And my subjects are so terribly limited. I think if they begin to talk kindly about Hindcup, I shall begin to cry." But no one was tactless enough to do that.

"Can you tell me if Herman is playing anywhere this week, Mr. Courteis?" Delia asked. "We want to go to hear him."

"Herman? No, he isn't playing again in London; he's leaving on Saturday."

"Oh, what a pity! Miss Sadler has never heard him play."

"The most individual artist I know," Courteis pronounced (he was fond of pronouncing on things and

TO THE STARS

people); "wonderfully individual; almost too much so for my theories of Art. But that is why people love him as they do."

"Do you think Art ought to be individual?" Miriam ventured to say.

"There's a difference between 'individual' and 'personal,'" Courteis began, in his laying-down-the-law manner. "It's personality that I don't admit; a great snare with women, Miss Sadler; remember that; they can't keep themselves out of what they try to do. That 'Treatise on Democracy,' now, was all mixed up with personal feeling, wasn't it?" He leaned across the table, looking hard at her as he spoke.

"Now, why did Democracy happen to interest you so much?" he asked, forgetting surely, as he asked the question, all that he knew about the girl, and her circumstances.

Miriam was helping herself to something at that moment, and paused, the spoon lifted in her hand, while she replied steadily:

"Because I belong to the so-called lower classes, Mr. Courteis, and their struggles after something happier and better interest me more than anything else just now."

The man who was holding the dish toward Miriam in the usual automatic way, looked down at her suddenly with interest and surprise. He told the story afterwards to the other servants, and they agreed that the new visitor was astonishingly honest, and a good deal to be respected for it. Courteis, on his part, was rather annoyed by his own want of tact in asking such a question. Delia and Alan Gore only were unmoved.

THE LADDER

"Now I call this very interesting," said Gore. "And I must entirely and flatly disagree with you, Courteis, and agree with Miss Sadler. It's the personal note you condemn in the 'Treatise on Democracy' that makes the new, valuable quality in it. We want exactly this—people from each class to write about it from the *inside*—they know."

"You told me yourself, the first day you met me, Mr. Courteis," said Miriam, "that I must write about what I knew, and about nothing else." A little smile dawned round the corners of her mouth; she had forgotten her miseries of a short time ago.

"And can't you do that without being personal?" Courteis asked. He leaned forward, pushing his desert plate and glasses to one side, as if they intercepted his view. "Take any instance—take me, if you like—I know a vast deal about the editing life. I could sit down and write all about it; but need I make it personal because I know it all? You must generalize personal experience before you get valuable results; do keep that in mind. Experience is only the raw material that you have to manufacture into the right stuff. As well say a cocoon is worth the same as a yard of silk."

So the argument went and came. Miriam was herself again, happy and interested. After their guests had gone, she came up to where Delia and Alan Gore stood, and told them how much she had enjoyed the evening: "Though I began it more miserably than I can ever say—" Her voice faltered, and she added: "It was my dress, you know."

They both laughed, just a little, though, for the sin-

TO THE STARS

cerity of pain in her voice forbade too much merriment on their part.

“Wait till the new gowns arrive,” said Delia, “and it will be worth all you have suffered. We are to dine with the Courteises on Friday. I hope they will have come by that time.”

THE LADDER

CHAPTER XVIII

ON Friday the new gowns came, and Delia insisted that Miriam's hair should be more becomingly arranged before they were tried on; but at this suggestion she blushed hotly.

"O Miss Gore, I couldn't have your maid do my hair; she wouldn't like it; she must know that I am not a person who is accustomed to have other people wait upon me," she cried. Delia considered for a moment; she had not thought of this difficulty. Then she suddenly bent down and kissed the girl's hot cheek.

"My dear, will you let me do it for you?" she said gently; "and don't you think you might stop calling me Miss Gore now?"

Miriam returned the kiss with lips that trembled. "Yes," she said. "Of course I don't mind letting you do it, if you will be so very kind—Delia."

So her hair was well done for the first time in her life, and then the new gowns were tried on. She beheld the effect of the morning gown in silence; without a word she divested herself of it and donned the evening dress; but to Delia's surprise, as she led Miriam toward the mirror, she saw that her eyes were full of tears.

"Oh, do you not like them? Have I made you spend your money for things you don't admire?" Delia exclaimed in dismay, for Miriam had turned

TO THE STARS

away from the mirror, and, regardless of the fine new dress, flung herself into the nearest chair and sobbed. Delia knelt down beside her and took her hand in great distress.

"It's wrong—it's wrong and cruel that *knowing* should make all the difference!" Miriam sobbed out at last. "Why can't we all know, and look right, and feel happy?"

"Oh, that would be quite dull," said Delia lamely. "It is far more interesting to discover about things, isn't it?"

"No, it is not," said Miriam almost roughly. She rose and gave herself a sort of shake, dried her eyes, and walked across to the mirror again.

"I look altogether different," she said. "And if I had only known before what to buy, and how to put it on, I might have been spared so much!"

It was undeniable, and recognizing this Delia went away and left her alone to get more acquainted with her new appearance.

Miriam stood gazing at her changed self for a long time, with a mixture of pain and pleasure; she was so changed!

"I don't think I mind Mr. Gore noticing, he is so *above* everything, somehow," she thought. "But the servants will notice. Oh, how I hate that they should know that this is my first evening dress!"

Delia came in again at that moment carrying an opera cloak, which she insisted that Miriam must put on. It was quite as painful to Delia to offer this as for Miriam to accept it; but it was obvious that she could not assume her black cloth jacket over the new

THE LADDER

dress, so she put on the borrowed cloak with as good a grace as might be, and they went downstairs together. Alan Gore was waiting for them in the hall; Miriam wondered if he noticed the change in her appearance, and felt certain that if he did not the butler did—which was undoubtedly true. She gathered up her voluminous new skirts with an unpracticed grip, and scurried to the carriage.

"Now we must all be as intelligent as possible," said Alan Gore, as the carriage drove off. "You especially, Miss Sadler, must be on your mettle; you're on approval for *The Advance Guard*, remember."

He leaned back in the carriage and looked at her with an amused expression, which Miriam at once construed into surprise at her changed appearance. He was, after all, as she grudgingly admitted to herself at that moment, just a young man, like any other; not too kind to notice her embarrassment, and be a little amused at it. Till now, she had put Alan Gore so apart from the rest of the world in her admiring thoughts that she had never considered him in this light at all. It quite startled her to do so.

"He will love some woman and marry her," she thought. "What would it be like to be honored by the love of a man like him? Yet, doubtless, the world contained even then the woman who was destined for this honor."

"A penny for your thoughts!" said Delia, and Miriam told a direct lie.

"I am keeping all my thoughts for Mr. Courteis; I have none to spare," she answered.

"I always think Courteis has such an interesting

TO THE STARS

house," said Gore; "as if all manner of stories looked out of the windows."

"All the remarkable people who have gone in and out of it have left a spiritual presence behind them," said Delia, laughing. "See, here we are—rather grubby *I* call it, with these small windows!"

As Miriam got out and went up the steps, she turned quickly and nodded to Alan Gore:

"I see, I see just what you mean," she said. "Things have happened here; I should expect things to happen here again."

"You see, Delia, you alone have no imagination. Miss Sadler and I know all about this house!" said Alan. They were shown into the drawing-room, which was dark, and shabbily furnished. The old Turkey carpet was worn almost threadbare; but the walls were lined with bookcases, and this made the room home-like. Mrs. Courteis gave them a listless greeting.

"I'll give you a seat opposite my new picture," Courteis said to Miriam. "Tell me what you think of it."

She looked in the direction he indicated, then suddenly rose, half-startled, resting her hand on the arm of her chair.

"Oh, who is it, Mr. Courteis?" she exclaimed. "I think I wish to get away from him."

"There! isn't that a compliment to the painter?" said Courteis. "Why, that's Herman, of course. I forgot you had never seen him. Well, there he is; don't the eyes follow you about the room?"

Yes, Miriam thought, they did. She actually edged her chair round as if to avoid them, and then turned

THE LADDER

back again to look. The picture represented a very young man with a sweet, boyish mouth and terrible eyes. As she looked at it, Miriam instinctively drew back and pressed her fingers against her own eyes, as if she had seen something too brilliant for them.

"Very good; a great deal of *chic* about it, isn't there?" said Courteis to Alan Gore. "He sent it to me last week; it's the work of that new French painter, Laramé; excellent, I call it."

"Why does he look like that?" Miriam asked.

"Because he is Herman, and there is none other beside him; that's all the reason I can give you for his looks," said Courteis. "You'll find that people of very exceptional talent generally look unlike the rest of the world."

The random remark sent a pang to Miriam's heart; not that she considered herself a person of exceptional talent, but she thought how unlike those other people she must have looked before she got into the ordinary garb of their world. Her self-consciousness came back fourfold, and once again she writhed under the sense of her own deficiencies.

When they went down to dinner, Miriam made the usual mistake of all young sailors on the sea of life: she tried to make interesting and clever talk, instead of waiting and letting her remarks come of themselves. Of course she did not talk well, and then, overcome with mortification, she became entirely silent.

"I can't talk either their talk or my own," she told herself in despair. However, it is very often only after we have confessed defeat that we rise to conquer. Miriam gave up the attempt to speak cleverly, and be-

TO THE STARS

fore she was aware of it, constraint had vanished and she was talking her best. Hers, as you may imagine, was not talk of the kind which is fatally easy among people of a certain amount of cleverness and cultivation—lightly speculative in tone, and helped out by apposite quotations from modern writers. Of this sort of talk Miriam was entirely innocent. All that she said was the result of her own first-hand observation and reflection; she had not read enough to quote other people's ideas readily to her own destruction. Courteis was delighted. Fresh "brain-stuff," as he called it, was the material he was most anxious to secure for his magazine, and he found it woefully difficult to do so. But here was a young woman singularly untouched as yet by the paralyzing finger of culture; would it be possible, he wondered, to get her to write a good style without spoiling this freshness of outlook? Uncultivated writing he could not endure for a moment; but how was this delightful freshness to be retained and cultivation added? It was a problem.

When dinner was over, Courteis led them into his study, ostensibly to see some books. After these had been admired he took up another large volume that lay on his desk, and handed it to Miriam.

"See, Miss Sadler," he said. "I wish you to try something. Look at this book—pretty stiff reading, and a lot of it. Will you take it home with you and write out an abstract of it, chapter by chapter, using the simplest, most lucid words you know to express what you find in it? Then, when you have done this, will you write an abstract of the whole, condensed as much as possible, and send it to me? Perhaps it won't

THE LADDER

do. Perhaps it will. In any case, your work won't be lost; you will find you have gained an immense deal by the time the thing is finished. Will you try?"

"What would I gain?" she asked.

"Lucidity, concentration of ideas, power of work. You won't regret it, I tell you."

Miriam lifted the big book and turned over the pages, reading a sentence here and there. Then she laid it down.

"Yes, I will try. How long may I take?"

"Oh, I won't bind you down; your own time, as you are a beginner."

Gore had been standing beside them, listening with frank interest to all they said.

"Now, then, there's a job for you!" he said, turning to Miriam.

"Beautiful!" she exclaimed suddenly, and both the men laughed.

"She has the enthusiasm of the beginner for work," said Courteis. "Wait until she has been in harness a little longer."

The girl turned her large, somber eyes upon him in surprise.

"Are you not fond of work, Mr. Courteis?" she asked.

"Yes, love it and loathe it by turns. It's as necessary as daily bread, of course; but have you never loathed your food?"

"Never, when I am well," she answered gravely.

"That's about it; but one sometimes has a sick mind, you know, or will know when you are older and sadder."

TO THE STARS

"It's a very grave symptom, indeed, when work becomes loathsome," said Gore.

"Yes, the man who loathes his work had better go down on his knees; he's past helping himself," said Courteis. He turned away as he spoke, and began to arrange the books he had taken down from the shelves. Miriam carried the big volume back into the drawing-room with her, to show it to Delia, nor would she be parted from it, but insisted on taking it back that night herself, instead of letting Courteis send it to her. In the darkness, as they drove home, she held it against her thumping heart, as tenderly as a mother holds her first baby to the breast.

"At last, at last; something tangible to try," she said to herself.

Oh, effort, effort! The staff, the hope of our race!

THE LADDER

CHAPTER XIX

BEFORE Miriam had been ten days in their house, she had lost all feeling of constraint and shyness with both Delia and Alan Gore. They had that sympathetic quality which is the most charming characteristic that man or woman can possess, and she found herself telling them all the petty details of her life. They seemed never to tire of her judicious descriptions of provincial society.

"Don't ask me more about my stupid life in stupid Hindcup," she would say, and then Delia would assure her that it was infinitely more amusing than ordinary society life. Alan Gore was particularly fond of her accounts of conversation in Hindcup.

"Tell me again of the young man who will never speak of anything but hydropathics or photography," he would say; and, with a certain acid pleasure in the task, she would reproduce some of Dr. Pratt's conversational tragedies. Miriam was not a vindictive woman, but she had been laughed at and despised by the natives of Hindcup for years, so it was perhaps natural that she should take a little revenge now.

"Now, do Mrs. Hobbes on 'girls,'" Delia would plead. "I'm so pleased with the term, I shall never call my servants anything else now."

Miriam would comply with the request; but while her audience swayed with laughter, her own heart felt

TO THE STARS

heavy enough. For, after all, this society she made fun of was her society, her real sphere, and this happy world where she now found herself, only an unreal, delicious phase of existence.

"I'm not going to do it any more. I won't tell you once again about Mrs. Hobbes and her 'girls,' or Dr. Pratt on Photography, or Aunt Pillar on servants' allowances. I shall be back among them all so soon," she said at last.

"*Scènes de la Vie de Province*," said Gore, laughing. "You must begin a new Balzacian series." He brought her a bundle of Balzac next day, and commended them to her attention. "That's what one mind made out of the provinces," he said.

It was a new and wonderful feeling to Miriam, this of having people interested in her. For so long the ugly duckling of her family, she had quite come to think of herself as nothing else. Now her opinion was treated with respect, and what was far more subtly flattering, she felt herself interesting to the people in the world she would have most longed to interest. She began to believe in herself, with a sort of trembling incredulity; perhaps after all she was not such a poor creature as they thought her in Hindcup!

The lonely soul, on first finding itself understood, experiences a peculiar and exquisite rapture. The whole world of sense seems to acquire a new reality and vividness for it. "I am born again," it says, and rightly; for with appreciation every faculty is brightened and strengthened; half-dormant characteristics are roused into activity; the whole being grows and blossoms out.

THE L'ADDER

In the company of these two people who believed in and understood her, you would never have recognized the Miriam Sadler of Hindcup. She drank in their talk and their ideas, as the thirsty ground drinks in the rain. But her position was not only that of a receiver; her contributions to the talk that went on were really the valuable part of it, for it was she who always started the topics—and a good topic for conversation is as important as a fox for a hunt. Knowing her own ignorance, she always put her ideas in the form of a question, and she would start an argument thus:

“Do you think, Mr. Gore, that all the Arts are transferable; that everything expressed in painting might be expressed in music or in words? Or do you think that there are some phases of feeling that can only be expressed by one of the Arts, some by another?”

And then Gore would discuss the whole question with her in his kind, interested way. It would be impossible to describe the joy these conversations were to Miriam, or how much she gained by intercourse for the first time with a man of powerful intellect and cultivation. If Gore could not answer questions, he would frankly admit his inability to do so; but when they had talked the question over, it was always, somehow or other, robbed of its stark terrors. Miriam, like most young people, had tormented herself with theological problems. The unintelligent religiosity of her mother and Mr. Hobbes had been the worst possible influence in this direction, and she had despaired of comfort. Now, with the sudden overwhelming re-

TO THE STARS

lief that a frightened child feels when it can sob out its terrors to some older person, she found herself telling Alan Gore all these fears and scruples. They were not at all extraordinary; nor were his suggestions for their allaying extraordinary either; but they seemed so to Miriam. This man, whom Mrs. Sadler had somewhat rashly labeled a freethinker, appeared to her daughter almost in the light of a divinity. That he was a man like other men, with faults and weaknesses, she could scarcely believe; and yet Delia assured her that this was the case.

"Alan is all very well," she said, with the awful uncompromising knowledge of a sister; "but, of course, he is far from an angel."

It was late one night, or rather very early one morning, that Miriam woke up to a sudden realization of her own feelings.

"Oh, I am making a mistake!" she cried aloud, sitting up in bed, and stretching out her hands, as if toward some unseen helper. The sound of her own voice speaking in the dark frightened her, and she lay down again, wide-eyed, staring into the darkness, staring into the future, into what might come to her. That arch fear which eclipses every other had assailed her; she was afraid of herself.

"Am I going to ruin my life, such as it is?" she asked herself. "Is the whole world after this going to be empty and worthless to me? Oh, surely not!" And then unflinchingly she set herself to face the truth. She was no more to Alan Gore than any other acquaintance; he had been very kind to her, as he was to everyone, that was all. Then surely she had enough

THE LADDER

pride and self-respect to keep herself from loving him. That was the situation—no more or less.

With one of those magnificent rallies of pride which are in women the equivalent of men's valor, Miriam gathered all the strength of her nature to her aid.

"Love a man who does not love me? Never, never, never!" she cried in her heart; and then with clasped hands she prayed in an agonized whisper, "O God, help me not to make a fool of myself! help me, help me!"

It was not a very conventional prayer; but, indeed, it came from the heart.

"I'll fight every inch of the way," she said to herself. "I'll not give in, not if it kills me. I'll make an excuse and leave here, and see no more of him. I'll get books from Mr. Courteis. I'll not think about him, nor try to hear of him."

She made herself look at the case as it would seem from the outside—the pitiable absurdity of Miriam Sadler, Aunt Pillar's niece, loving Mr. Alan Gore! The thought stung her and helped her. She recognized the value of this treatment, and pursued it; she was almost laughing at herself. Persons of romantic tendency will think worse of Miriam for thus rejecting "the celestial crown"; but perhaps she gained another, even if not such a bright one.

It took her a long time to come to these painful conclusions. All the night through she lay awake, and the first carts had begun to rumble past in the streets before she had finally decided upon her course of action. It would not do to propose to go home abruptly, she must suggest it gradually. The end of

TO THE STARS

the week must be the conclusion of her long visit. At last, having decided this date, she fell asleep.

When she came down to breakfast, a letter from home lay beside her plate.

"Do read your letter," Delia said, and Miriam opened the envelope. The communication it contained was neither interesting nor dramatic; but Fate often speaks in a rough tongue, and this unromantic letter decided the date of her home-going. In her usual unmitigated style Mrs. Sadler wrote:

DEAR MIRIAM:

I have had one of my bad attacks of the bile, and have been in bed for the last three days. Nothing will lie on my stomach. I think you must come home and look after me.

"Mother is ill," Miriam said, turning to Delia. "I'm afraid I must go home immediately."

Alan Gore laid down the bundle of letters he was opening, and addressed her with that quickness of interest that was his great charm.

"Why, how unfortunate! I hope that there's nothing seriously wrong?"

"No," she said; "only biliousness, but it means my going home just as surely as apoplexy."

They laughed at her solemn speech; but Delia was much annoyed.

"There are so many things we wanted you to do and see. Well, you must come again soon," she said.

"It will never be the same," said Miriam. She knew in her heart, though she could not say so to them, that everything would be different because she

THE LADDER

herself would be changed. But her friends would not admit that things would alter, and made all manner of delightful schemes for "the next time," to which she listened with a grave smile on her lips, a smile that did not mean cheerfulness.

"Why, the next time you will be well known I hope," Gore said. "You are going home to write all manner of remarkable things for our friend Courteis. Your next visit to us should be much more interesting than this has been."

Miriam listened, and shook her head. Then she turned to the consideration of her journey.

"I must go home to-day, I'm afraid," she said. Alan Gore brought out a railway guide and began to turn over its mysterious pages in search of the Hindcup trains.

"When do you wish to arrive?" he asked. The question seemed to bring home to her the reality of her departure; she winced as if some one had struck her a blow.

"I'm afraid I don't wish to reach it at all, but I think I should go as soon as possible," she said.

"Well, there's a train at half-past eleven; will that do?"

"Yes," she replied bluntly; there seemed nothing more to say.

"I'm so sorry I can't go down to the station with you," said Delia. "I've some one coming to see me at eleven."

"Oh, I can see myself off," said Miriam. Gore rose and gathered up his letters from the table.

"I must go now," he said, "so I'll say good-by,

TO THE STARS

Miss Sadler. Good-by, and all manner of luck—no, not luck, success in your efforts.”

Miriam took his hand. She would have liked to look straight into his kind, clever eyes, but she could not.

“Good-by,” she said, and he was gone. Delia followed her upstairs, and sat down in her room while she packed the yellow tin trunk.

“There go the poor, despised old frocks,” Delia said. “Why, I wouldn’t crush them like that if I were you; you will probably want to wear them again at Hindcup.”

“Oh, I suppose I shall relapse into the primordial slime whence I arose,” Miriam said, trying to speak lightly, but the bitterness she felt broke through in her voice. Delia rose and came across to where the girl stood, and laid her hand on her shoulder.

“Don’t speak that way, my dear,” she said. “You’ll never relapse, believe me; you’ll go on and on.”

But at these kind words Miriam broke down.

“It’s no use pretending to be happy; I’m miserable, and everything at home seems horrible,” she sobbed.

Delia was much too uncompromising to attempt the usual methods of comfort. She made Miriam sit down beside her, and taking her hand, began to try to discover what she was feeling so miserable about.

“Do you feel as if it had been a mistake, your coming here?” she asked; “please answer me straight out what you feel. I’d rather know the truth, for it was my fault, if the mistake was made.”

This was a difficult question for Miriam to answer. She sat looking down at the floor in silence.

THE LADDER

"No, I am glad I came," she said at last—"very glad. I think I see quite a different horizon all round me. It's only painful to think of going back to the more limited one; how painful, you can never know."

"I don't suppose I can," Delia admitted.

"I seem to have learned such a number of things——"

"Well, you look quite different; they won't know you at home," said Delia, thinking she referred to her initiation in dress.

But Miriam shook her head.

"If you knew how little that seems to me compared with other things!" she said. She might have explained further, but her cab was announced at that moment, and the remainder of her packing had to be hurried.

Delia came down to the door with her, and standing on the steps in the bright morning sunshine, they said good-by to each other.

TO THE STARS

CHAPTER XX

WHEN Miriam reached the station, she found there was some time before the train left. The platform was sparsely dotted as yet with passengers and their luggage, and after the modest yellow trunk had been labeled for Hindcup, she walked slowly up to the far end of the platform.

To her surprise she saw that two familiar figures from her Hindcup world were there also—her cousin, Mrs. Broadman, and young Dr. Pratt. They, too, had caught sight of her, and with an exclamation of surprise, Maggie came up to speak to her cousin.

"Why, I didn't know you for a minute!" she exclaimed, passing Miriam's clothes in a rapid review as she spoke.

"I never saw a girl more changed in such a short time; wherever did you get these clothes? They're too plain, somehow. I didn't know you were coming home so soon. I've been at Maida Vale stopping with Cousin May, so I'm not up to home news. I did hear your mother had been ill, but I never supposed you would come home for *that*. Really, you're quite altered, somehow! How long is it that you've been with these swell people?—I forget."

She rattled on, giving Miriam no opportunity to make a reply to the numerous questions.

"Here's Dr. Pratt, too," Maggie pursued, as the young man came up to inquire, with an elaborate bow

THE LADDER

and handshake, how Miss Sadler had enjoyed her time in London.

"I have enjoyed it very much," she answered; but her tone was not encouraging. She did not wish to discuss her visit with him. Dr. Pratt, however, prided himself on his conversational powers, so he went on:

"I suppose you have visited a number of theaters? 'Done them' is, I believe, the proper expression just now, if one wishes to be up-to-date."

"I did go once or twice," Miriam admitted.

"I daresay you have plenty to tell us, that's to say, if you *will* tell us," said Maggie. "But perhaps we're scarcely fine enough for you now. Come, doctor, we had better get into this carriage by ourselves; my cousin seems to wish to be alone."

"O Maggie, don't. I don't wish to be alone," Miriam exclaimed, though aware that she was saying what was decidedly untrue.

"Well, come in here. Here's an empty 'second,'" said Maggie. "Mr. Broadman is always wishing me to travel 'first,' but, as I say to him, if I travel 'second' I save a good deal, and yet it makes a difference from going with common people, so I always do it. I suppose you do the same, Miriam, only the common people come down 'third' to Hindcup."

"Then I am one of them," said Miriam gleefully, exhibiting her third-class ticket. But Maggie Broadman was not going to be disgraced by her cousin. She pulled out a fat morocco purse with a silver monogram on the back, and handed it to the attendant Dr. Pratt.

"See, doctor," she said. "Will you be so kind as to see about changing my cousin's ticket? I'll pay the

TO THE STARS

difference." She liked to show that money was no object to her.

Miriam resigned herself to her fate, and entered the second-class carriage along with her cousin. She leaned back into the window-corner, looking listlessly out at the people passing by. Suddenly her heart seemed to stop beating, for, in the distance, she saw Alan Gore coming slowly along the platform, looking into each carriage he passed. Her first impulse was to cower back into the darkest corner of the carriage and try to escape his notice, then she named herself a coward and leaned forward instead as he approached.

"Ah, there you are!" he said, pausing at the carriage door. "I brought you some books to while away the hours with. Are you all right? Your luggage labeled?"

Miriam received the books, almost dumb with pleasure at the gift.

"Yes," she said, "I'm all right. I have met my cousin, Mrs. Broadman," she added, indicating who her companion was. Maggie leaned forward, well pleased to join in the conversation. She prided herself on what she considered her irresistibly arch manners toward the other sex; often she had reproved Miriam for her "dull ways with the men." So she rallied Alan Gore brightly on having given Miriam more books.

"My cousin's really too much taken up with books already," she said. "I always tell her a young lady should have other interests—well, more natural ones. Before I married, now, nothing interested me so much as a dance, and a new dress, and perhaps the young

THE LADDER

gentlemen I met in the evening; but Miriam here is so learned, she never seems to care about these things—at least, she never did in Hindcup. Perhaps you have taught her more in London.”

Miriam’s sufferings during this speech were very grievous. She leant back into the corner of the carriage and flushed painfully. Alan Gore looked down at his boots with a very noncommittal expression for a minute.

“I’m afraid I don’t share that feeling against books with you,” he said then. “I don’t see why they should confuse the natural interests of life in the least.” He looked up at Maggie Broadman as he spoke, with his keen, frank glance that seemed to measure her capacities as a pair of scales measures defective weights of sugar.

Maggie was struck with a sudden dumbness; the abstract was not her vein. She sat back into the corner and remarked that it was very warm. Dr. Pratt appeared then to return Mrs. Broadman’s purse. He carried a bunch of comic papers. Gore stood aside to let him get in, and then held out his hand to Miriam.

“Good-by; I’m glad you have some one to look after you,” he said, and turned away into the crowd. For one awful moment Miriam thought that she was going to cry. Tears welled up in her eyes, her throat ached, and she could not speak. Maggie and Dr. Pratt were gazing at her.

“So that’s Mr. Gore! I should have known him, too, for I saw him at the *fête* at the Manor. It was very polite of him coming to see you off that way, Miriam; very polite. I felt a little *de trop*, really.”

TO THE STARS

Maggie tried to look archly suggestive, and Dr. Pratt said:

"Yes; when a gentleman comes to see a young lady off on a train, he generally calculates on finding her alone."

Their words stung Miriam like a whip. It was the best thing that could have happened, for she was so angry that she forgot to cry.

"Oh, you needn't have troubled yourself with feelings like that," she said hotly. Mrs. Broadman smiled, and Dr. Pratt began to read his papers. He was, in some respects, a good-looking man, with well-cut features and curly hair; but Miriam seemed to-day to see nothing but faults in him. She wondered why he wore a ring on his thick finger, and why he scented himself with musk. Yet Dr. Pratt was a good-natured young man, not at all stupid in his profession, and the adored of her cousin, Emmie Pillar. Miriam sat looking at him, and wondering why Emmie liked him.

When the train moved out of the station, Maggie Broadman opened a fashion paper, and Miriam was at liberty to look at the books Alan Gore had brought her. And even to do this, to look at them, feel them, turn over their pages, seemed to soothe and cheer her. Here was a kingdom that she might enter undismayed, the grandest, widest kingdom of the world, the realm of thought. Here beauty dwelt, and such measure of truth as we may know, and peace from all the petty irk of living.

She did not read much; but she sat holding the books all the way to Hindcup, and the journey, after all, was not an unhappy one.

THE LADDER

CHAPTER XXI

MIRIAM found her mother in bed and very sick and sorry when she arrived at home.

The "girl" had reduced the kitchen to a state of melancholy untidiness, and was, after the manner of her kind, smeared to the eyes with black-lead, though not a grate in the house seemed to have been polished. The only food to be found in the larder was cold beef-steak; of this there was a large amount lying on a dish, surrounded by cold, watery gravy coated with grease. There seemed everything to do.

But there are worse predicaments in life than finding everything to do. Miriam felt almost thankful for the confusion that reigned in the house. It seemed natural to take off her London dress, reassume the prune merino and an apron, and begin to put everything to rights. All her ideas had undergone a profound change in the three weeks she had been away from home. Instead of thinking more of luxury and beauty of surroundings, she had come to think much less of them; she had begun to realize that what lies behind beauty and luxury and creates them, is of infinitely more importance than they are. As she sat down at last in the woefully ugly little parlor, now tidied up and dusted, Miriam said to herself that even this hideousness did not much matter if she could live the right kind of life among it. But these abstractions were

TO THE STARS

broken in upon by a sharp tap at the door—Aunt Pillar's tap, as Miriam well knew—and the next minute her aunt's portly figure blocked the doorway.

"So you're home again!" she said. "I must hear all your news; but, in the meantime, I've come to see your mother. How do you find her? Is she able to see me, do you think?"

Miriam led the way to her mother's sick room, and drew a chair near the bed, that Aunt Pillar might see for herself her sister's condition. A few perfunctory inquiries and condolences, however, were all that Aunt Pillar wasted on the sufferer. As was quickly evident, her whole interest centered upon hearing how Miriam had got on in London. For, scarcely listening to Mrs. Sadler's plaintive iteration of "Nothing will lie on my stomach," she turned abruptly round to question her niece about more interesting subjects.

"So you're back," she said. "And how did you get on among the fine people in London?"

"They were very kind to me. I have enjoyed myself very much."

"I'm told they keep a very fine establishment; our butler was with them before he came to us. I've heard him say as the house was very handsome."

"I daresay it is."

Aunt Pillar brought down her fat foot with a stamp upon the carpet.

"On my word, Miriam, you are a provoking girl! Did not just the *fineness* of it all not surprise you?"

"No; I don't think that was what surprised me most," said Miriam slowly.

"Then what was it? Can't you speak out? Really,

THE LADDER

it's bad for your mother being aggravated in this way ; nothing sets up the bile more ; and if she's like me, she must be fairly provoked with you."

"I think, Aunt Pillar, it was the fineness of their minds, of their ideas, their ideals, that impressed me," the girl said slowly, hesitating as if in search of the exact words to express her meaning.

It was nonsense to mention the word "ideals" before such a listener ; but Miriam really spoke more to herself than to her aunt. Still, the admission that anything had impressed her niece with fineness rather mollified Aunt Pillar ; she looked Miriam up and down, and nodded her head.

"I daresay it would ; I daresay it would. To be sure, the ideas of the gentry are quite different from ours. To show you what I mean, her ladyship thinks nothing of laying down her ten or twelve shillings for perfume, and Sarah, her maid, tells me each handkerchief she has she pays her five shillings for—the ones with embroidery, that is. Yes, they're brought up to large ideas, Miriam, as you say, and it's little wonder you felt surprised by them."

Mrs. Sadler's feeble voice made itself heard from behind the curtains at that point.

"I'm sure," she said, "it won't have done Miriam any good to learn to pay five shillings for a pocket handkerchief, if that's all she went to London to learn."

Miriam might have done better to allow her relatives to think that she had referred to the Gores' ideas on expenditure ; but in justice to her late entertainers she tried to explain her meaning a little more clearly.

TO THE STARS

"It wasn't that sort of fineness I meant, in the least," she said, hesitating how best to make her point clear. "I meant that they took such high moral views of everything, and regulated their lives by such fine standards of living."

"I'm sure I'm glad to hear it. I was afraid from what Mr. Hobbes said, that they were very irreligious," said Mrs. Sadler.

"Tut, tut, Priscilla. You're righteous overmuch," said Aunt Pillar. She was provoked by Miriam's attitude to the Gores, provoked more than she could say. She rose and prepared to go off, yet lingered to catch an item or two from this unsatisfactory niece.

"Tell me this, at least; did they treat you like one of themselves, or did they dine separate, or what?"

Miriam shook her head and laughed.

"No, no, Aunt Pillar; I wasn't separated from them in any way," she said.

"Well, I'm sure, then, I hope it won't have done you more harm than good. I don't myself see the *reason* of it all; what were you asked for if they weren't going to do anything for you? It puzzles me altogether."

"Perhaps something may come of it yet," suggested Mrs. Sadler.

"Did they speak of doing anything for you?" Aunt Pillar went on. She liked definiteness in human affairs.

"No, they never did. They are not like that; they do not want to do things for me; they wish to help me to help myself," said Miriam. "And isn't that the truest kindness?"

THE LADDER

"Umph!" said Aunt Pillar. She held the good old ideas of the overlord and the retainer—the one the giver, the other the receiver—she did not hold with these new-fangled views of self-help.

"All very well, Miriam, but those in high places have a lot in their power, and, if I were you, I wouldn't be above asking a good thing from them, seeing they've been so affable. There was that young woman, Hitchcock, you remember Carrie Hitchcock? a silly, useless thing; I wouldn't have engaged her for any position myself; well, didn't her ladyship take a fancy to her and recommended her here, and recommended her there among her friends, till she got her out as maid to the Countess of Malvern going to Australia! That's what influence will do. There's nothing like it."

"I wouldn't be recommended to any position I couldn't fill," said Miriam loftily.

Aunt Pillar smiled a grim smile.

"There's more than appears about the getting of most positions, my girl," she said. "Merit has wonderfully little to do with it, and we must just take the world as we find it. I'm afraid you have a number of silly ideas, Miriam, that you'll live to see the folly of yet. And this is just one of them. Don't be above taking help where you can get it. I know the gentry. They're idle, and want to be thought busy. There's nothing they like better than philanthropy; so, take whatever they'll give, and be thankful."

The girl thus admonished smiled, and kept silence; a provoking thing to do, it must be admitted. Aunt Pillar fastened her cloak, took up her umbrella, and walked to the door.

TO THE STARS

"You may smile, Miriam, and think you know more than me that has lived a lifetime at the Manor, because you've spent three weeks with the Gores. But what I tell you is true, and, as I say, I know the gentry and their ways, which is more than you do. Good night, Priscilla; good night, Miriam. Make your mother a good cup of beef tea; *that* will lie on her stomach, if anything will; and don't have your silly head turned with a little attention from those above you. They'll never think of you again. It's their way; anything for novelty; pet you one day, and the next throw you over like an old shoe. I know them. Good night; I must be off."

She bustled down the staircase, that creaked under her heavy step. Miriam watched the stout figure disappear down the twilight street, and then turned back into the house with a sigh.

THE LADDER

CHAPTER XXII

SEVERAL days passed, and as Mrs. Sadler did not show speedy enough signs of improvement, Miriam sent for Dr. Pratt—always a last resource with her.

He made his usual bright, musk-scented entrance into the sick room, and in a very short time had finished his diagnosis of Mrs. Sadler's simple but trying ailment. Miriam had listened to his suggestions, and now sat wondering why the physician did not take his leave. But this was explained when Dr. Pratt remarked:

"I must ask for your congratulations, Mrs. Sadler, and I daresay you will be a good deal surprised—" He paused, with a jocular little attempt at hesitation, though Miriam saw he was longing to go on with his news.

"You're never going to be married, doctor!" Mrs. Sadler exclaimed, though why she should have been surprised by such a natural step on his part is difficult to explain.

"Indeed I am, and I daresay you can guess who the lady is," he said. "I consider myself the luckiest of men." Miriam knew that her cousin Emmie was the lady in question; but Mrs. Sadler guessed several other names before Dr. Pratt smilingly supplied her with the right one.

"You see, Mrs. Sadler, we have been prudence it-

TO THE STARS

self," he added. "I said long ago to Emmie that we must remember everyone is watching us."

That curious self-importance which overtakes the newly affianced almost like a disease, had fallen upon Dr. Pratt. Mrs. Sadler could scarcely conceal her mortification at his announcement. While Emmie Pillar had remained unmarried, Miriam's loverless condition seemed less noticeable; but now that Emmie had secured this eligible young man, what would the Hindcup world say of Miriam? Mrs. Sadler asked the question bitterly of herself, and gave brutal reply in her own heart:

"They'll say she *can't* marry, and it's not far from the truth. Dear, dear! Emmie getting married so nicely, and my Miriam left. It's just as Aunt Pillar told me long ago, the result of all this study!"

Miriam, too, was silent for a moment, from far other reasons; she was wondering what it could be that made her cousin Emmie want to marry Dr. Pratt.

"Am I not to have your congratulations, then?" Dr. Pratt said; and she laughed and held out her hand very pleasantly to him.

"I think you are to be congratulated," she said. "Emmie, I am sure, will make the best of wives; she has always been my favorite cousin." This, if Dr. Pratt had known the truth, was not saying much, but it was the best that she could say.

"She is a little jewel," he said, swelling with self-importance and delight.

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Sadler bitterly; "a fine, womanly young girl, clever with her needle, such a cook, and a born housewife."

THE LADDER

"As I said, I consider myself the luckiest of men," Dr. Pratt repeated, and Miriam found herself wondering how often in the long annals of the human race this phrase had been reiterated by intending husbands.

"Emmie and I have decided not to delay our marriage for long," Dr. Pratt pursued; "for everyone will be talking so much."

"To be sure they will," said Mrs. Sadler. "You're very wise. I daresay Emmie will be here soon to tell us all about it."

"I daresay she will, so I must be off," said Dr. Pratt. They watched him march away down the street looking extraordinarily well pleased with himself.

"Well, I never did!" Mrs. Sadler exclaimed in a little while. "Emmie engaged! How those girls have gone off, to be sure."

"Yes, haven't they?" Miriam agreed, and in an inadvertent moment she added thoughtfully: "I wonder now what Emmie sees in that man to make her wish to marry him?" No sooner had she spoken than she saw her mistake and wished the words unsaid; but Mrs. Sadler unfortunately caught their import. She sat up on the pillow and turned her yellow face angrily to her daughter.

"You'll drive me wild with your nonsense, Miriam!" she exclaimed. "What does she see in Dr. Pratt!—a well-to-do, handsome young man, driving his own dog-cart and getting into a good country practice. What more would any girl want, I'd like to know? It's unwomanly the way you talk, and sometimes I'm downrightly ashamed of you."

TO THE STARS

"I'm sorry I provoke you, mother," said Miriam, wondering once again why she ever expressed what she thought about anything. "I'll go downstairs and get that mustard plaster the doctor advised you to have," she added, glad of an excuse to leave the room and let her mother's irritated feelings calm down.

As she was coming downstairs the front door flew open, and Emmie rushed in, flushed, and excited-looking, wearing an air of triumph that almost made her cousin laugh aloud.

"Good morning, Miriam. How's aunt? It's a horrid thing, biliousness. Have you heard the news? *I'm engaged!* You won't guess to whom; no, you *never* will; look at my ring. *Mizpah*; so sweet and so original. Sydney—but there I've let it out; but it'll be all over the town soon! Look at my ring; Sydney likes *Mizpah* better than any other design; so do I. We made it up at the Badminton Club yesterday—you never come there; Sydney plays so splendidly, you might come just to see him play; now that he's my *fiancé*, you will have a double interest in him."

Miriam kissed the flushed young face, and suggested that they should go into the kitchen while she prepared the mustard plaster. "Sydney ordered it," she said a little mischievously. It was really quite safe to laugh at Emmie, who never noticed it. Miriam fetched the mustard tin and began to mix the plaster; then she asked Emmie suddenly if she had much in common with Dr. Pratt. The question sprang to her lips before she quite realized what she said, and Emmie was naturally offended by it. She drew herself up

THE LADDER

with a little bridling movement that was characteristic of her.

"I am devoted to the doctor," she said with great dignity. "We have a great deal in common—we are both musical; he went six times running to hear *Pinafore* once, and so did I; in fact, our tastes are identical."

"Oh, that's all right, then," said Miriam cheerfully; and Emmie, who was very good-natured, was quite placated.

"You see, it's because you scarcely understand about love that you ask such silly questions," she said in a confidential tone, perching herself on the corner of the kitchen table. "I hope you'll have an admirer some day, it's such fun being in love."

"Really?" said Miriam, mixing away at the mustard. Emmie's words recalled to her mind something she had read in "Tristram Shandy":

"I thought love had been a joyous thing," quoth my Uncle Toby. "'Tis the most serious thing, an' please your honour, (sometimes) that is in the world."

But her reflections were broken in upon by Emmie's prattle.

"Yes, what a man wants is a cheery sort of girl, not one that will worry him with ideas and books, and all that sort of thing. Since my engagement, I seem to understand so much more about men. Sydney says he wants a pretty little plaything, not some one to talk philosophy with him."

"I didn't know he talked philosophy," said Miriam.

"Sydney can do anything. But, as he says, what he wants is a wife, not a philosopher."

TO THE STARS

"I daresay *that's* quite true," said her cousin.

"Well, to be quite frank with you," said Emmie, "it was apropos of yourself that all this came out. It was after he had traveled down from London with you and Maggie; he had been noticing you all the way, it seems—how you had been reading. 'It's not *restful*, darling,' he said in his sweet way, 'to see a woman reading in the way your cousin does. I don't wonder the men are afraid of her'; and then he added a lot of nonsense about myself that I cannot repeat—" She paused, wishing very much indeed to be asked to repeat it all, but as Miriam did not encourage this confidence she went on:

"Then I thought it so clever the way he added, 'Emmie, what a man wants is a *wife*, not a philosopher.' He is very brilliant. (I am telling you all this, because I think it may do you good.) Now that I'm engaged I hear so much from Sydney of what men think and feel."

"But, then," Miriam interpolated, "all men are not like Sydney."

"No, indeed; very few are; but if you get the opinion of a very clever one like him, it is worth a great deal."

Miriam smiled, spreading the mustard on the paper.

"I must go and administer this," she said. "I shall want to hear all about your trousseau soon," she added, with an effort to be sympathetic.

"Oh, I've decided on white satin for the wedding gown—Sydney likes it; and the going-away dress is to be blue. The bridesmaid's presents bothered me a little, but curiously enough we both hit upon the same

THE LADDER

idea, and it's *quite* original, I think—you'll never guess—curb bracelets."

"It will be a surprise!" echoed Miriam. "And who are the bridesmaids to be?"

Emmie named the honored maidens, adding Miriam's own name to the list.

"There!" she said, "that's a surprise for you, for you know you are just getting a weeny bit old for a bridesmaid—nearly five-and-twenty. But Sydney wanted it. He says he has known so many matches made up at weddings, and he's just as anxious as I am that you should get married. It's so nice to be engaged! He has a great friend, a doctor, too, who is to be a groomsman; perhaps he might fancy you—who knows?"

"Who knows?" Miriam echoed, and she laughed to herself all the way upstairs, and all the time her poor mother lay groaning under the mustard plaster she continued to laugh.

TO THE STARS

CHAPTER XXIII

MIRIAM had been too busy for a fortnight after her return home to look at the book Courteis had given to her. But as Mrs. Sadler got better she found time to begin her studies again. A few chapters sufficed to show the trend of the book. She laid it down and considered what she was going to do. For this author went full tilt against many things—churches, priests, creeds, marriage, the whole social and religious framework of English life. The book was very cleverly written, and it amused her to read it; but, she asked herself, if she were to write an abstract of it, and if by any evil chance her mother were to see it, what would happen?

Of course, had she been a girl in a Sunday-school story, she would at once have tied up the book in brown paper and returned it whence it came. But being a girl in real life, she decided to risk the danger and do the work. After all, it was ten chances to one that her mother never heard anything of it. Mrs. Sadler never asked what her daughter was writing, and it was almost impossible she should ever read the article if it came out.

Having thus argued with herself, Miriam attacked the bit of work with tremendous energy. It was far from an easy task. The author started far back at the beginning of things, inquiring into the origin of each

THE LADDER

of the institutions which he attacked; then he followed up their growth, and finally began to pull them to pieces again. Miriam's business was to assimilate all this knowledge, and present it in an easy form for the benefit of the general reader.

She steeped herself in the arguments of this revolutionary, laughing sometimes to herself as she read the more daring sentences.

Then came the work of writing the abstract. Week after week she toiled at it, and found the days short enough as they passed; but at last the article was concluded and sent off, and Miriam rested from her labors. It seemed a long time till Courteis wrote, sending her proofs of the article. She could scarcely believe her eyes when the great bundle of printed stuff arrived; but she was happily alone in the house and able to take the package up to her own room and study it in private. She read the proofs through, corrected one or two blunders, and then laid them away in a drawer of her toilet table, for she did not yet possess the luxury of a writing desk. This done, she went out to have a walk, little dreaming of the blow that would await her on her return.

It was a lovely evening in late autumn and Miriam walked slowly along through the lanes enjoying the beauty of the evening. She felt wonderfully peaceful and happy, somehow, as if things had taken a turn for the better in her life. The joy of doing actual work—work that she loved—cheered and soothed her; life seemed worth living, even in Hindcup. The dusk was falling as she turned her steps homeward; in the distance the lights of the town came out one by one.

TO THE STARS

Miriam quickened her steps and came in fresh and brisk from the night air. She looked almost pretty, had there been anyone to notice it.

But she found Mrs. Sadler far too busy with something else to observe her looks; for, as she came into the parlor, her mother was reading the proofs that she had left safe in the drawer in her own room.

She stood stock still on the threshold of the doorway, gazing at this terrible sight. There was a moment of tingling silence, and then Mrs. Sadler wailed out:

"Oh, dear, did you write this?"

Miriam closed the door, and came across to where her mother sat. She knew that the time had come to fight for freedom again.

"Yes, mother; how did you get that? I did not mean you to see it," she asked.

"I went up to your room to find the key of the sideboard. I remembered I gave it to you last night, and I could see it nowhere, so I opened your toilet drawer, and I saw this, and began to read it; and O Miriam! how wicked it is!" Mrs. Sadler covered her face with her hands and began to cry. It was natural enough that she should do so, for she was fully under the impression that her daughter had originated the daring conclusions which were voiced in this article. She had read so cursorily that only a jumble of ideas remained with her, and these the most startling.

Miriam sat down and tried to explain her own innocence in the matter; but Mrs. Sadler would take no comfort.

"No, no; you've written it, and this is the end of

THE LADDER

all these studies. I'll never be happy till you give them up; they'll lead you to no good," she said.

"Well, mother, I won't give them up. I am sorry to grieve you, but I cannot. These are not *my* views, they are the views of the man whose book I am describing to other people, that is all. Please read no more of it, and think no more about it."

But she might as well have spoken to the wind; nothing would now convince Mrs. Sadler that these were not her daughter's views.

"You wrote it, so you must believe it," she repeated over and over again.

And the evil did not end here. The next day Maggie Broadman came to remonstrate with Miriam on the error of her ways, having heard a highly colored version of the story from Mrs. Sadler.

"I'm glad to find you alone," she said. "I've come to speak about something—I daresay you know what I mean—" She stopped, almost daunted for a moment by the glowering anger in her cousin's eyes.

"I daresay I can guess," Miriam said.

"Of course, it's about this writing of yours," Maggie proceeded, in her patronizing voice. "You really must be careful what subjects you choose. A young woman like you perhaps scarcely understands about these subjects. As I said to your mother: 'No doubt it was ignorance made Miriam write that awful paper,' and that seemed to comfort poor aunt a good deal."

"When I write something that you all have a right to be ashamed of, you may come and speak to me," said Miriam; "but till then I can do without your advice. Mother has made a mountain out of a mole-

TO THE STARS

hill, that is all." Her eyes blazed with anger; Maggie had never known that her cousin possessed so much temper. She rose rather hastily.

"Oh, well, I won't waste words upon you," she said. "Take your own way."

"I certainly intend to do so," Miriam retorted.

This little interview was bad enough; but exasperation reached a climax when Emmie came to remonstrate. She found Miriam writing in her own room—a unique opportunity for advice as to the nature of the composition.

"Oh, you're writing! I've come to show you patterns of my wedding-gown stuff," she said, scattering papers to right and left without a thought of apology. "I want the brocade, after all; Sydney thinks it suits my complexion better than the dead white. O Miriam, I wish you would get married, and then perhaps you would stop writing horrid things that everyone is shocked at. It's much nicer to be married. Couldn't you manage it? I used to think that young Evans at the bank had an admiration for you; but no man will long admire a girl that doesn't respond to him at all. Can't you go in there oftener? I saw you go into the grocer's for change yesterday, when it would have been *quite* as easy to cross over to the bank. You'll be left an old maid if you don't take care! Sydney tells me he used to be quite afraid of you in what he *will* call his 'bachelor days.' So silly of him."

She paused; but as Miriam scarcely knew which of these numerous suggestions she should reply to, she left them all unanswered, and Emmie went on:

"Sydney is quite annoyed by these stories about you,

THE LADDER

Miriam; about this article you've written, I mean. He says it is so against a girl's chance of marrying. To think that you should write *against marriage*; it was so strange of you. What put such an idea into your head? Sydney was saying he could not understand it, unless it was that you hadn't any admirers and were a little soured by it. But, then, as I said to Sydney, you are quite young still, after all, so it can scarcely be that; I think it must be because you've never been in love. If you only knew what fun it is being in love, I'm sure you would stop writing against marriage."

"Perhaps some day even I may have that unique experience," said Miriam; but the sarcasm was entirely wasted on Emmie.

"I am sure I hope you will; it's not at all impossible yet, but it's time you began at five-and-twenty. Why, I had three proposals before I was twenty-one!"

"Yes, I know that," said Miriam; but again the meaning of the remark was not apparent to Emmie.

"And when I remember what fun it all was, I don't understand how you think marriage should cease," Emmie went on. "Dear me! I'd have had a dull time in Hindcup if there hadn't been any talk of marriage."

Miriam was glad to be able to laugh heartily at this conclusion, and the laugh did her good.

"Come and let me see your patterns, Emmie," she said, "and we won't talk any more about this storm in a tea cup."

Aunt Pillar was the next to remonstrate. She came

TO THE STARS

over to Hindcup late one evening, and asked to see Miriam alone.

"So this is the end of your visiting with the Gores," she said, fixing her hard eye on her niece. "That you come back to disgrace us all. It's the want of all worldly wisdom in it that vexes me. Your poor mother never had any, and you're like to follow in her steps, writing nonsense, and worse than nonsense, as I understand."

"I hope I'll never do that," said Miriam.

"Well, you've done it once, by all accounts, and once is enough in a lifetime." Then, with a sudden quick look at her niece, Aunt Pillar added: "Did you know the Gores were coming to the Manor for Christmas? It'll be awkward for you; they won't be able to take much notice of you here, though they were so intimate with you in London; but after this that you've written, perhaps they won't have anything more to say to you."

Miriam's cheeks flamed.

"I am sure I shall be quite pleased with whatever they do," she said.

THE LADDER

CHAPTER XXIV

THE pool of Bethesda, we are told, had no magic quality until the angel had troubled it; and, in the same way, that deep well of the human heart has to be stirred and troubled before it gives forth the best that is in it. Emotion of one kind or another has been the begetter of every work of Art; it does not matter very much what the emotion is, provided it is strong enough; hate will serve as well as love, bitterness as well as joy; only let the pool be sufficiently troubled, and behold the magic results!

Miriam did not know this sweet use of adversity. It seemed to her that all the petty irritations of her life at present were for no good end at all, and could never be turned to any account. And yet they were surely leading her on to the larger events of life.

This is how it happened. She had come in one afternoon feeling more than usually provoked by her cousins; they had all been offering her advice, criticising her writing (about which they knew nothing whatever), and generally irritating her. In anger and bitterness unbearable, Miriam sat down and wrote out all the overflowing annoyance she was feeling. I cannot say that what she wrote was kind; for it was not. But it was true, which many kind bits of writing are not. If she had been badgered and irritated she would at least hit back indirectly. Aha! there was some satisfaction in that.

TO THE STARS

What a gallery of female portraits she could draw! She knew so much about her sitters. She ran over a list of them; the engaged young woman, the young matron, the young mother, the unmarried woman, the old woman, the cousin, the aunt—each had her delicious foibles, her exasperating traits, that might be pitilessly written down for the world to laugh at.

“They don’t think I know much about men,” said Miriam, grinning to herself; “but I know enough and to spare about women and their ways. If they are so hard on me, I shall touch them up a little, for a change!”

With something of the scientific spirit, then, Miriam approached her task. It was a species of vivisection, cruel enough, but, oh! the delight of it! of that first quite simple little description of an engaged young woman—Emmie, in other words. All the ineffable silliness of poor Emmie’s character was plainly set forth, her ridiculous self-satisfaction and self-absorption, her deplorable tactlessness. “The Affianced One” was a very pretty bit of writing, and Miriam was almost aware of the fact. Down in the bottom of her heart she had a lurking feeling that it was unkind to transfix poor Emmie thus, like a butterfly on a pin; but the artistic joy of seeing the work grow under her hand quieted the pricks of conscience. Then she turned her attention to a study of maternity as presented by her cousin Matilda, who had lately added to the population of Hindcup. Matilda’s attitude now was the simple one that no such feat had ever been accomplished before in the long annals of our race. Eve contemplating Cain and Abel cannot have been

THE LADDER

more enamored of her achievement. Matilda now considered herself competent to advise anyone on the management of infants, and she seldom spoke on any other subject. With an extraordinary ingenuity she could bring conversation round to her child, start it at any point you like to name. All this Miriam had been noticing for long, and "Mater Triumphans" reproduced these observations.

Grace Pillar, Miriam's only unmarried cousin, was the next model. Grace was the most unfortunate type of spinster. She was always skittishly alluding to her age, and yet would be considered young at all costs; her agreeability was almost disgusting; in her excessive desire to please, she forgot all dignity, and her claim to have a life of her own. To see her slavish, almost reverential, attitude toward her married sisters, just because they were married—nay, to Emmie, just because she was engaged to be married—was a sight to make the heart ache. But it was also rather nauseating. Any man would have satisfied Grace; only to have been chosen out of the herd, and promoted to wifehood, and allowed to become a mother, she would have asked no more. It was curious why such an apparently simple joy had not been granted to the heart that so craved it; but it was not in the scheme of things that Grace should be married, so she remained unsought. O Miriam, you should have been kinder here; the other victims of your revenge were at least profoundly pleased with themselves; it is otherwise with poor Grace.

"Apotheosis" had its origin in Maggie Broadman's transparent and fatuous delight in all things pertain-

TO THE STARS

ing to herself, her house, her servants, her husband, her children, her dress. Once she had been Maggie Pillar; now she was Maggie Broadman all things were hers. The fact that things belonged to her afforded Maggie a satisfaction that it is difficult even to guess at.

These, and several other portraits, Miriam executed with savage pleasure. At first she wrote them with no thought of publication; but gradually it dawned upon her that they might find acceptance with the public.

"Would it be safe?" she wondered. "I don't suppose that people ever recognize themselves. . . . I'll send them to Mr. Courteis and see what he thinks. . . . I might publish them anonymously."

So to Courteis they went; and, of course, were received with approval, as every genuine human document is sure to be. There was no doubt at all of their quality; they were quite excellent.

"I like the nip in them," Courteis wrote. "They will make people laugh; send me as many as you please. I shall publish one every week—of course, as you wish it—anonymously."

Miriam did not dare to get those numbers of *The Advance Guard* which contained her productions; that is to say, she did not dare to see them at home. But at Miss Foxe's house she allowed herself the pleasure of reading them. She and Miss Foxe laughed together over the character-sketches many an autumn afternoon.

One day, shortly before Christmas, on her way back from The Old House, she met Maggie Broadman and

THE LADDER

stopped to speak to her. Maggie, however, showed no inclination to stop, but merely nodded coldly and passed on down the street.

"She must be in a hurry," Miriam thought. Then a little farther on Matilda came in sight, with the perambulator, of course, and again Miriam prepared to greet her cousin. To her great surprise Matilda drove the perambulator into the roadway and crossed to the other side of the street with scarcely a sign of recognition. War was declared without any doubt whatever, and conscience waking suddenly in Miriam's breast, told her the reason of these hostilities. In the evening Mrs. Sadler came, moist-eyed and in breathless haste, from the prayer meeting, cast herself down in her armchair, and called to her daughter:

"Miriam, Miriam! I've heard it all! What's this you've done now? It's all over Hindcup, and not one of the family will ever speak to you again!"

"What have I done?" Miriam asked bravely, but her breath came a little short as she spoke.

"Written accounts of them all in a wicked London paper, for money. Matilda told me she had read all about herself and her little Thomas in it, and Emmie and her trousseau too; and, O Miriam! what's to be the end of it all?"

Miriam, to tell the truth, was dismayed at last. She had never dreamed that her cousins would see *The Advance Guard*, or that seeing it, they would recognize themselves there.

"Some one must have been trying to make mischief," she said evasively. But Mrs. Sadler knew all about it.

TO THE STARS

"It's Herbert Pratt, the doctor's brother; he's in a printer's office in London, you know; the office as prints this paper, it seems. He told the doctor it was known who had written the papers, and he sent the numbers down to him, so they all saw for themselves."

Miriam sat in silence for a little.

"Well, mother," she said at last, "it's a great pity; but seeing it's done, the best we can do is to laugh about it. Don't take it too seriously; that only makes the matter worse."

Mrs. Sadler, however, as her daughter knew only too well, might always be relied upon to do the worst it was possible to do in any emergency; her instinct in this way was unerring.

"Laugh at it!" she cried. "Indeed, it's no laughing matter; if you won't do so, I'll go myself and beg pardon of every one of them!"

"Oh, mother, *don't*; it's quite the best way to make them think more about it," cried the girl. "Do leave it alone, say no more about it, and let the whole thing blow over."

But nothing would persuade Mrs. Sadler that this was right, and Miriam saw that she was already rather looking forward to the round of apology-making—it was the sort of thing she enjoyed.

Miriam was very much annoyed with herself for having got into such a difficulty; surely she need not have added this offense to her other sins; it is bad enough to live among uncongenial people if you are on good terms with them, but if you are at war with them, life becomes almost impossibly difficult.

"I shall have to leave Hindcup," she told herself;

THE LADDER

and the thought was not altogether disagreeable. But in the meantime she had to face a great deal that was unpleasant.

- The Pillars were not a family that took ridicule well; self-delight was their leading characteristic, and this had been mightily offended by Miriam's shafts. They held a family council, where it was decided that they would continue to speak to their erring young relative, but that she was never to be asked to any of their houses, or included in any way in the family life. They "owed it to themselves," as the delightful phrase goes, to see that after such an offense, she was not treated with too great leniency.

As Christmas drew near, this exclusion from the life of the Pillar connection became very marked, for it was their custom to make a great deal of the festive season. An immense amount of eating and drinking went on in their various houses. On Christmas Day they all dined with Maggie Broadman, because she was the wealthiest of the family, and loved to display her gear. On Christmas Eve they had a little dance at Matilda's house, and the next evening Grace and Emmie and Timothy always gave what they called a "party" at the original Pillar homestead.

Mrs. Sadler was duly invited to all these entertainments, but Miriam was excluded from them. At first, with some faint maternal feeling, Mrs. Sadler had declared she could go nowhere without her daughter, but a little pressure made her reconsider this decision, and she promised to attend all the gatherings.

Now youth is youth, be it never so intellectual, and on Christmas Eve, after Mrs. Sadler had gone off to

TO THE STARS

Matilda's dance, and even "the girl" had departed on some little junketing of her own, Miriam sat by the parlor fire feeling very lonely and sorry for herself.

"I've cut myself off from my own people, and I am nothing to anyone else," she thought.

The book fell from her hand; she sat staring into the fire. Outside, the crisp night air was full of the merry voices of young people bent on amusement—the whole little Hindcup world was abroad that night; she alone was dull and lonely.

Then Miriam heard a brisk step come up the path, and a sharp knock upon the door. She opened it, expecting to see the postman; it was not the postman, however, but a footman from Hindcup Manor.

"Good evenin'," said he. "Miss Sadler live 'ere? Our Mrs. Pillar's niece?"

He was a young, rather jaunty-looking fellow, and he stepped inside the door, as he spoke, so as to get a better look at Miriam.

She hesitated for a moment.

"Yes, I am Miss Sadler. Have you brought me a message from Mrs. Pillar?" she asked.

"Well, no, Miss—Sadler—" he said, with a little hesitation both in voice and look, "not just so to say from Mrs. Pillar; but I've a letter for you 'ere from Miss Gore as wants an answer."

Again Miriam hesitated. She was alone in the house, so she decided to ask the man to wait at the door. She turned into the parlor and opened the note. It was from Delia, asking how they were to meet. "Shall

THE LADDER

I come and see you to-morrow? Or tell me which day would suit best," she wrote.

As she stood wondering which day and hour to appoint, the young man at the door became impatient. He coughed slightly, and remarked from the door: "Very cold evenin', Miss Sadler."

It was only natural. He knew this young woman as Mrs. Pillar's niece; why should he not make some efforts at conversation with her? For a moment Miriam felt annoyed; then she remembered how absurd it was of her to be so. She decided to ask him to come in.

"Will you come in and wait while I write this note?" she said, as simply and kindly as she could; but at the sound of her voice the young man seemed to take a different view of the situation.

"Thanks, Miss Sadler, I'm very well here; my boots is a bit muddy," he said hastily.

Miriam scribbled her answer and handed it to him.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting so long," she said. The young man protested that he had not found the time long; he could not understand Mrs. Pillar's niece, somehow; she was unusual. He wished now to be agreeable, yet scarcely knew how.

"Comin' to our dance on Friday evenin'?" he asked tentatively. "We're 'avin' it decorated very fine, indeed. If I might ask for the pleasure of a dance—" He paused and hesitated.

"Thank you," said Miriam, "but I'm not coming to the dance. We are not tenants of Sir Samuel's; it is a tenants' ball."

"Oh, beg pardon; thought perhaps being friends

TO THE STARS

to our Mrs. Pillar," he said; "but there, you'd not care about it, I expect, miss."

It was a tribute he found himself forced to pay to this something there was in Miriam unlike her own class. She smiled and shook her head.

"Perhaps not; perhaps you're right," she said, as she held the door open for him to pass out. But as she came back into the empty room, she wondered if it would have been impossible for her to enjoy the dance at the Manor.

"Delia and Alan Gore will be there," she thought.

THE LADDER

CHAPTER XXV

THE post next morning brought Miriam another letter from Delia Gore. She read it over twice, and then turned to her mother:

"This is from Miss Gore, mother," she said. "I told you she wrote to me last night, and that I asked her to come here to-day to see me; well, it seems that Lady Joyce has something else she wishes her to do to-day, and so she—Lady Joyce—asks me to come to the Tenants' Ball on Friday, instead. Do you think I should go?"

"I think, my dear, that you are a very fortunate young woman, getting this chance for a little amusement when your own folly has cut you off from everything else. I'm sure it's very kind of her ladyship asking you. I suppose you'll need a fly from the 'Green Man.' Aunt Pillar will look after you; of course she isn't very well pleased with you just now, but she's not as put out as the others, because you haven't written anything about her *yet*, whatever you may do before long, so I daresay she will not make any difficulty about you. Yes, indeed, I think you ought to go."

Miriam was not so sure about it herself. Of course she longed to go, but would it be prudent for her to do so? Perhaps she might see Alan Gore, perhaps—oh, might that be possible?—even dance with him!

Prudence had long ago told her that she should

TO THE STARS

avoid meeting Gore again, and she had listened to the voice of this unloved adviser, and thought that she would obey it. But Miriam would have been less than a woman and wholly intolerable if she had listened to it now.

"I shall be happy for once," she said, "whether it makes me miserable afterwards or not." She could have echoed the words of the old song:

Eh for Friday nicht,
Friday at the gloamin',
Eh for Friday nicht,
Friday's long in comin'!

For it seemed as if Friday would never arrive.

When it did, what a toilet Miriam made! Never had she bestowed so much care and thought upon her appearance; but it is gratifying to know that it was to some good result. A musty-smelling fly came round at eight o'clock from the "Green Man," and she rumbled off in it toward the Manor.

It was only eight months since that spring evening, that already seemed so far away, when she first met Alan Gore in Aunt Pillar's parlor. Yet the whole world was changed, and how changed she was herself since then!

A great deal of commotion was going on in the kitchen regions at the Manor. No one was there to open the door for her, so she found her way as well as she could along the passages to Aunt Pillar's room.

That good woman was lying back in her armchair much exhausted.

"What with anxiety that cook should be successful

THE LADDER

with dinner when there's so much else going on, and worry as to whether them caterers from Goodhampton would put out the ball supper rightly, I'm all in a perspiration," she ejaculated as Miriam came in. She found energy, however, to survey the appearance of her niece.

"That will be the dress you bought in London, I suppose; it's very plain; but really I must say you've improved; you look quite the lady, somehow. Did you say Miss Gore chose it for you?"

"Yes, Aunt Pillar."

"Well, to my mind, that kind of plainness is another form of pretension, when we put it on; our class wear trimmings naturally."

"But don't you think the plain things are nicer?" Miriam asked.

"Perhaps for the like of Miss Gore; they seem up-pish in you. Well, it was kind of her ladyship asking you to-night. When I am a little rested we'll go down to the hall. The dancing begins at nine o'clock. I'm sure I hope the girls will behave well; that under-housemaid is a nice piece of goods, if ever there was one, and I'm not too sure of the kitchenmaid, either."

After a little more in this vein, Aunt Pillar rose from her chair, wiped her face, and adjusted her grand lace cap at the glass. She wore her black trained silk gown, "relieved," as she would have expressed it, by collar and cuffs of Honiton lace, a gift from Lady Joyce. A very large cameo brooch fastened the collar, and a gold watch chain was festooned across her bodice. Altogether Aunt Pillar was a figure to fill the eye.

TO THE STARS

"Come away, then, Miriam; I must be going down. I hear the band tuning up. Lor'! but I'm tired and hot!" she exclaimed, sweeping down through the draughty back passages like a ship under full sail.

The hall was crowded when they came in; but a way was made for Aunt Pillar through the crowd, and she moved up to the top of the room, and took her stand beside the butler, with whom she entered into dignified conversation.

Miriam stood a little behind her aunt and looked about her. She did not know all the people, by any means, for they were tenants on the estate, not natives of Hindcup; but she knew most of the house servants. After a minute or two the footman who had brought the note came up rather shyly to address her.

"You've come, after all, Miss Sadler," he said. "I 'ope I may have the pleasure of a dance with you."

"Thank you," said Miriam, as pleasantly as she could; but her heart sank. Was it for this sort of thing that she had come to the Manor ball?

She saw two of the housemaids nudge each other and giggle.

"See James a-makin' up to Miss Sadler," one whispered to the other. And then the door at the far end of the hall opened, and Lady Joyce and her friends came in. They were all laughing and talking together, a bevy of men and women. It took Miriam a minute or two to make out Delia and Alan Gore among them all. She did not like to look hard at them, and with a sudden consciousness of the difficulty of her position, she shrank behind Aunt Pillar and hoped they would not see her. Delia came slowly up the hall, looking

THE LADDER

round her, then she saw Aunt Pillar and advanced to where she stood.

"O Mrs. Pillar, has your niece come yet?" she asked. Miriam stepped forward, and answered the question in person. That curious ease which she always felt with Delia had taken the place of her momentary shyness; she laughed with pleasure to see her friend again.

"I was hiding behind Aunt Pillar," she said. "I felt so shy and strange; but now you are here it is all right."

Even as she was speaking, Alan Gore came up to where they stood.

"Are you going to dance with me?" he said, looking at her with an amused, pleased expression.

"O Mr. Gore, I'm sorry. I have just promised to dance with Thomas, the footman," she answered.

"But I don't fancy you have promised to dance with him all the night? Perhaps I may come after him?"

"Oh, yes, of course you may," she said.

"And has the world been going well with you lately?" he inquired. "We have been immensely amused by your sketches in *The Advance Guard* of late."

"Oh, don't please speak about them!" Miriam exclaimed. She would have explained further, but James came up at that moment to claim his dance, and the explanation had to be deferred.

He laid a large, heavy hand on her shoulder and led her forward.

"There's a man for you!" he exclaimed as they stood together; he indicated that it was of Alan Gore

TO THE STARS

he spoke. "Not another like him—don't tip as heavy as many of the gentlemen that comes here, and yet—well, there's that in 'im that none of them has."

"Yes," said Miriam. "I know what you mean."

"Speaks to you different, somehow. And I'll tell you what, Miss Sadler, it ain't just affability; they're mostly all affable, or wish to be; there's not a more affable gentleman than our Sir Samuel in England. But Mr. Gore's not affable, 'ee's human."

"Yes." She agreed again, and the eulogist pursued:

"Went into his room with a telegram this very mornin'. I was a bit worried over something meself to-day. You wouldn't suppose as anyone would notice the way I looked, but 'ee did. Mr. Gore did, asked me straight out 'W'at was the matter?' and 'ad me telling of it all to him before I knew where I was."

"Ah!" Miriam cried. "That's it! Something no one else has. If all the world was like Mr. Gore, there would be an end of all this hateful class feeling."

James was surprised. He had been hearing about Miriam from the other servants; evidently what they said was true; she was peculiar.

"Well, I ain't got no quarrel with my class, nor yet with the gentry, when I'm treated decent," he said. "But I hear you're a bit different, Miss Sadler, risin' in the scale, so to say?"

"It has been my misfortune to long for knowledge, and desire expression," said Miriam gravely.

"O Lor'!" said James, and the heartfelt exclamation made her laugh. She had, indeed, forgotten to whom she was speaking, and could readily understand

THE LADDER

how ridiculous her remark must have made her appear to the young man. The laugh did something to atone for the highfaluting sentiment that had preceded it, and James, a little reassured, drew her in among the dancers. But when his dance was over, he made no effort to secure another with this strange young woman; he made his way across the hall to where one of the smart young housemaids stood.

"Come, Ethel, 'ave the polka with me," he said persuasively; "Mrs. Pillar's niece 'as given me the shivers up me back. That's not the 'orse for my money!"

TO THE STARS

CHAPTER XXVI

RELEASED from the society of James, Miriam went and sat down at the side of the room to wait until it was time for her dance with Alan Gore; she was not anxious to have another partner in the meantime. It was quite sufficiently amusing to sit there watching all that went on; she was content and happy.

When Gore came for their dance she could scarcely speak for pleasure; to stand beside him, to hold his hand was a rapture she had never guessed at before.

"I'm afraid you're thinking this all a great bore," he said, misinterpreting her silence.

She looked up at him and smiled.

"Oh, no, indeed I am not," she assured him.

"Well, when our dance is over, we shall sit down and talk; one can't dance and talk rationally at the same time," he said.

Miriam laughed. "I have just frightened that young man, the footman, James, so much. I said something rational to him, and he thought I was crazy."

"What did you say?"

"Only that I desired knowledge, and expression, or words to that effect."

"Poor James! And what did he say?"

"He said, 'O Lor'!' and never spoke to me again."

"Well, be warned, and say nothing profound to me until I sit down."

THE LADDER

It was soon over, very soon it seemed to her, and then they sat down on the benches at the end of the hall. Miriam watched the crowd before them with somber, intent eyes.

"What do you see in it all?" Gore asked her.

"I have had little amusement or gayety in my life," she began hesitatingly; "and when I catch a glimpse of it sometimes, I begin to wonder if it isn't, after all, the most valuable real bit of life; just to be alive and amused and delighted. Is that not worth more than anything else?"

Gore sat looking down at the ground in silence; indeed, he was silent so long that Miriam thought he could not have heard her question.

"Do you know," he said suddenly, "I've felt that, too, as if all the aspirations and struggles of life seemed empty nonsense compared with the emotional side of it—'By all these things men live'—there's no getting past that."

Just as he spoke, a woman passed close to where they sat. Miriam had noticed her when she came in with Lady Joyce. As she passed them, she made a little fluttering gesture with her hand to Alan Gore.

"Oh, who is that?" Miriam exclaimed. "How beautiful she is. I have never seen anyone so beautiful!"

"That is Sophia Hastings, the woman I am going to marry," Gore answered. There was a short silence.

"I did not know," said Miriam. She could not say a word of well-wishing or felicitation to him; curiously enough the words that passed through her mind were those of poor Swift's epitaph she had been reading

TO THE STARS

and wondering at the day before: "Where fierce rage can tear the heart no more."

She seemed to understand at that moment what the terrible words meant. The injustice of things appeared suddenly manifest to her; the way in which everything went to some favorite of the gods, while others as good, but outcasts from their favor, were tossed only the crumbs from the feast. Why should this woman get everything? Had she done anything to deserve such happiness? she asked herself stupidly, ignoring the obvious fact that it is very seldom the deserving who get their deserts. Young and beautiful, and doubtless wealthy, why had this crowning blessedness been given to Sophia Hastings? A little more knowledge of life would have taught her that it was just because Sophia Hastings was young and beautiful and wealthy, that the final blessedness was added to her brimming cup. But, as yet, Miriam had not this knowledge; she still thought that felicity should be earned.

"You have not wished me joy," said Alan Gore. (Almost the same words that Dr. Pratt had used, but how differently they affected Miriam!)

"I am tired of wishing joy to other people; I want some of my own, for a change," she answered bitterly and ungraciously. Her words made Gore look up in surprise.

"I'm afraid things have not been going well with you," he said. "Is anything specially the matter?"

"Yes," she answered, "something very special. I happen to be very miserable to-night, and it seems the last straw to hear about your—her—happiness."

THE LADDER

"I am so sorry that I told you," he said. Another dance had begun, and the whirling figures passed and repassed before them. The music, loud and pulsing, rang in her ears; it seemed intolerable to Miriam. She longed to go away and leave all this noise and be alone. But that was impossible. She pulled herself together with a great effort.

"This isn't the time or the place to talk about one's griefs," she said; "nor to think about them, either. And, O Mr. Gore, I hope you will be happy! I don't know how I could be so disagreeable just now."

She did not wait to hear his answer, but turned away into the crowd and sought for Aunt Pillar. The night would come to an end sometime; she must get through it as well as she could.

Aunt Pillar welcomed her with unwonted geniality.

"Here you are, Miriam, just when I was looking for you; you're in luck to-night. I saw you going round the room with Mr. Gore. Here's Mr. Spens, the house steward, wanting a dance with you now."

So Miriam danced with Mr. Spens, and you may be sure he found her a dull enough partner. Then Aunt Pillar, in her capacity of chaperone, produced two or three other men for her niece's benefit; and she had to get through a dance with each of them. Twice in the course of the night she suggested that she must be going home, twice Aunt Pillar refused to let her go.

"Her ladyship would notice it," she said; "after getting the invitation, it would never do; she would think you weren't enjoying yourself, and really it's wonderful how many dances you've had. You've scarcely sat down all the evening!"

TO THE STARS

At last, however, Aunt Pillar allowed that the time had come for her niece to go.

"You've a longish drive before you get home, so you should be off now. I'll send James to get the fly round to the door for you," she said. Miriam gladly escaped into the cool air of the passages, and made her way down to the door.

James, a little happy after various suppers, had produced the flyman. He came to put Miriam into the fly, and took the opportunity of squeezing her hand in a friendly way, as he helped her into the vehicle. "Good night, Miss Sadler," he said; "and a Merry Christmas to you. And take my advice and leave them haspirations alone, an' look out for a good 'usband."

He tucked the train of her dress in, and banged the door of the fly.

Miriam sank back against the fusty-smelling cushions and sobbed. Thus ended her Christmas ball, and a chapter of her life with it.

THE LADDER

CHAPTER XXVII

AT breakfast next morning Miriam had to tell her mother all about the ball, that is to say, she told her precisely such things about it as mattered nothing at all. Mrs. Sadler listened with great interest, and then, in her turn, gave an account of the evening she had spent at Matilda's.

"And a very pleasant party it was, all the cousins, and myself, and Mr. Smaile—" She paused and smiled.

"Why, Mr. Smaile?" Miriam asked. "I wonder why Matilda asks him to her house—a horrid old man."

"O my dear! such a way to speak of the best of men," Mrs. Sadler exclaimed.

Mr. Smaile was an ex-schoolmaster living on a tiny annuity in Hindcup. He had always been a pet aversion of Miriam's, though she could not very well say why she disliked him so much. She hated even to meet him in the street, and turned away from him instinctively. He was a short man with a profuse white beard covering his face almost up to the eyes.

"I wish you didn't take them violent dislikes," Mrs. Sadler remarked; "and it's so often for those I respect and like. There's Mr. Hobbes, too; you've never a good word to say for Mr. Hobbes."

"Oh, I'm sure he's a good man," said Miriam evasively, and changed the subject.

It was a cold, bright morning out of doors. A great

TO THE STARS

scarlet sun climbed up through the frost-fog, gained the victory over it, and then shone down out of a cloudless sky. In the meadows every blade of grass was stiffened into a tiny white spear; the whole world was dazzling with light and stung into briskness by the nip of the winter's breath.

Miriam worked away all the morning at various household tasks, and only in the afternoon escaped for a walk in the fields. She took the long, undulating road which leads out of Hindcup to the higher country lying to the north. It was a beautiful road, dipping now and then into hollows where beech trees grew, and then mounting by long slopes bordered with wild holly hedges. Here and there a row of ilex trees had been planted, classic, un-English-looking trees that gave a strange picturesqueness to the landscape. When all the distance was hazy, they stood out black and shapely against it. Miriam breathed a long sigh of relief as she got out into the country, for she had longed for solitude, and it is one of the special trials of households such as she lived in, that solitude can rarely be procured there. She stood and looked round her at the calm, wide country, and a sudden sense of relief and comfort stole over her. The frost of the morning had disappeared before the strength of the noonday sunshine, and now a soft white haze hung over the land, heralding the quick winter dusk. How beautiful it all was! Among all the change and sadness of life, here was one fixed point that nothing moved—the beauty of the world. It was a great, undeniable fact, as immense, as irrefutable as the fact of sin and misery.

THE LADDER

"And in the same way," Miriam thought, "the happiness there is in the world is a certainty as real as the misery in it; even if I do not share in this happiness, that is no reason for disbelieving in it; as well might a blind man disbelieve in the light that other men walk by."

As then, side by side with the barrenness of her own life, Miriam realized the excellent beauty of the material world, and the strange bliss that mortality may enjoy, she seemed for the first time to catch sight of the whole instead of only part of life.

"Oh, if I could only write it! if I could write it!" she exclaimed aloud. She had walked on, her eyes bent on the ground, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left, and in this way had not noticed that some one was standing beside a gate at the side of the road. It was Max Courteis. He came forward laughing, and held out his hand to her.

"Good people say your sin always finds you out; what do you wish so much to write?" he said.

"O Mr. Courteis! I—I didn't know you were here," she faltered.

"I came down till Monday to The Old House—quite unexpectedly. Well, you haven't told me what it is you wish to write."

"The whole of life, instead of bits of it," said Miriam.

"Rather an ambitious programme, eh? Well, how are you going to begin? You must make a curious plum-pudding sort of thing, if you wish to get at the truth (you see, one can't escape Christmas, it's in the air and affects one's metaphors), a lot of stodgy stuff,

TO THE STARS

some plums and peel, and flaming brandy sauce added a-top, if you're a clever cook."

"I think I recognize all the ingredients except the brandy sauce; what does that stand for?"

"Passion, of course; without which you will never write a good book."

Miriam had been brought up in a prim school; the word brought a blush to her cheek, but she recognized the truth of Courteis's words.

"Well?" he pursued. "Do you think you can supply them all?" He was very much amused by Miriam's hot cheeks.

"I don't know; perhaps I can't," she said.

They had gained the crest of the long hill, and paused now to look down into that little green valley which lies below the road.

"Halloo! look at the hounds!" Courteis exclaimed.

A knot of huntsmen in pink were gathered where a low bridge crossed the road; the hounds were questing about to either side—they seemed at fault. The huntsman was calling to them with strange cries.

Miriam and Courteis stood to watch the little scene; her sympathies, womanlike, went with the fox.

"I hope he'll get away," she said.

"Oh, bad luck if he does," said Courteis, true in turn to his sex.

As they stood thus, two riders came swiftly across the field, a man and a woman. The horses took the fence and passed down the road like a flash; Alan Gore was one of the riders, Sophia Hastings the other.

As they passed, without noticing her, Miriam turned aside; her face went suddenly white.

THE LADDER

"Why, that was Alan Gore!" Courteis exclaimed, glancing at the girl beside him.

She turned away hastily.

"Good-by, Mr. Courteis; I don't wish to stay and see that poor fox killed," she said, and walked away down the hill so quickly that Courteis had no time to reply. He stood looking after her for a minute and whistled to himself.

"I wonder about that brandy sauce," he said.

By the time Miriam got home it was almost dark. It was past tea time she knew, and she wondered if her mother had waited for her; but Mrs. Sadler apparently had not waited, for a clink of china and the sound of voices announced that she was entertaining visitors.

Now, as you may imagine, it was not pleasant for Miriam—pariah as she was—when any of her cousins and neighbors chose to come to the house. It would never do, however, to give in to this feeling, so she entered the parlor as bravely as might be.

Mr. and Mrs. Hobbes were there, and the detested Mr. Smaile. So great was Miriam's aversion to the man that she involuntarily stepped back at sight of him, and stood for a moment irresolute in the doorway.

"Come in, my dear; you're very late," said Mrs. Sadler. She looked flushed and excited; her cap was slightly awry.

Miriam greeted her mother's guests and sat down at the tea table. An ominous silence fell; but she was almost accustomed to this token of disapproval.

"Have you been out on one of your long walks?"

TO THE STARS

Mrs. Hobbes asked, and Miriam replied in the affirmative, adding that it was too fine a day to be spent indoors.

"We have been cutting up the sandwiches for the Christian Institute tea," Mrs. Hobbes said; "but I suppose you think *that* rather a waste of time?"

Miriam made an evasive answer, and again silence fell. Mr. Smaile was stirring his tea very carefully, looking down into his cup and smiling. He cleared his throat and slipped in a remark in his hurried, sly manner:

"I'm afraid Miriam does not see eye to eye with us all." The girl looked up at him, surprised and angry. She had never heard him speak of her by her Christian name before, and she did not like that he should do it.

"I am afraid not," she said very coldly.

"Your dear good mother, here, and I see eye to eye in everything," Mr. Smaile went on, and then added: "Our tastes, in fact, are identical."

Miriam looked round the little party in a mystified way. Something seemed to be exciting them; something she did not understand.

"I think we must explain to Miriam," said Mr. Hobbes.

"Explain what? Has anything happened that I don't know about?" she asked.

"Well, I daresay it will come as rather a surprise to you," said Mr. Hobbes. "The fact is—shall I go on, Mrs. Sadler?"

Mrs. Sadler sat back in her chair and smiled in a curious way, and Mr. Hobbes went on:

THE LADDER

"The fact is, that Mr. Smaile and your mother are going to be married. It's an old friendship, and a very suitable marriage, and I'm sure will be for the happiness of everyone concerned."

Miriam rose and stood upright by the table, trembling with anger. It was a minute or two before she could command her voice enough to speak, then she turned to Mrs. Sadler.

"Mother," she said, "is this true?"

"Yes, quite true, my dear. Smaile and I settled it all last night," Mrs. Sadler replied, but not very stoutly. A braver soul than hers would have quailed before the anger that burned in her daughter's eyes.

"It can't be true. You *are* my mother, aren't you? You can't mean to marry that creature!" she cried, regardless of all civility in her hot disgust.

"O Miriam! what a way to speak; indeed, if I had had a better daughter perhaps I would have thought twice about marrying again," cried Mrs. Sadler.

Mr. Hobbes now tried to pour oil on the troubled waters. He appealed by turns to Miriam and to Mrs. Sadler, begging them to be calm; but his words only roused the girl to greater anger.

"I won't listen to anything any of you have to say," she declared. "There is no other side to the case; the whole thing is odious."

"Now, Miriam, don't set yourself against your poor, dear mother," Mrs. Hobbes broke in. "You might all be so happy together, you and your mother and Smaile; what with the something he has, and the some-

TO THE STARS

thing she has, 'tis a most comfortable arrangement, to my mind."

"There, you have told the truth at last, Mrs. Hobbes," Miriam cried. "It's my mother's money, such as it is, that he wants. Yes, Mr. Smaile, if my mother were very poor you would not be so anxious to marry her."

"This is more than I can stand," said Mr. Smaile, rising hastily at Miriam's last words, and addressing Mrs. Sadler. "If your daughter is going to insult me, it will be better for me to go. Good night, my dear. Good night, Mrs. Hobbes; I don't like to cause family dissensions." He scuttled to the door as a cur flies from a volley of stones.

"Miriam," said Mr. Hobbes very solemnly. "Miriam, you are a firebrand."

Mrs. Hobbes was awed into silence, and Mrs. Sadler wept.

"I think you had better go, too," said Miriam to the remaining guests. "I don't see what outsiders have to do with this. Mother and I must settle it together."

"Oh, well, I'm not one to stay where I'm not wanted," said Mrs. Hobbes, flouncing to the door.

Miriam waited till they were gone, and then came and sat down by her mother.

"Now that you are alone with me, will you listen to what I have to say?" she asked.

Mrs. Sadler wiped her eyes.

"Where's the use, my dear? You do take such violent views!"

Miriam began her argument. But before it was half

THE LADDER

done, she recognized the futility of it. Mr. Smaile had appealed to that strongest weakness of the female heart—vanity—and nothing that could be said weighed for a moment against his flattery.

“You must remember, mother, that you are elderly now; it is your *money* he wants,” she repeated; but this plain statement did not in the least convince Mrs. Sadler.

“*You* may say so; but Smaile has often told me he thought me a very handsome woman yet,” said Mrs. Sadler.

“O mother! he just said that to please you,” said Miriam.

“Well, I’m sure your father often said the same,” poor Mrs. Sadler cried, in self-defense.

“But that was thirty years ago, mother——”

“And then Smaile is such an earnest Christian——” Mrs. Sadler began, passing on to another plea. But her daughter would not hear this for a moment.

“Mother, how can you take Christ’s name in vain like that!” she cried. “Christians are those who follow His example. Did Christ scheme and plot for money, and flatter women?”

“Oh, my dear, you do say the most blasphemous things as ever were said!” cried Mrs. Sadler.

Thus to and fro their argument went, always coming back to the same conclusion. Nothing would turn Mrs. Sadler from her determination to marry again.

“Very well, then, mother; I shall leave you. I would never even try to live in the same house with Mr. Smaile,” said Miriam.

“Well, remember it’s not me that turned you out,

TO THE STARS

nor yet Mr. Smaile, for he spoke very handsomely about you, and how he hoped we'd all be happy together."

"I shall take the blame, mother," said Miriam. She felt a sudden sense of relief. The place had been too straight for her for years; now a decision had been forced upon her—she must leave home.

"I shall go out into the world and work and—and—" she thought.

How often in conjecture we come up to this "and—and"—the unknown, the unknowable—that closed door against which we beat ourselves in vain!

THE LADDER

CHAPTER XXVIII

WHAT to do next? Where to go? Who to ask advice from? All these questions crowded upon Miriam. That she would go to London was obvious; but where in London? How could she live alone there? Who would be her helper? There was Delia Gore, of course; she was the first person to consult; but then it was so difficult to see Delia at the Manor. Miriam decided to write to her instead. But in the meantime the news of Miriam's conduct to Mr. Smaile had spread to all the cousins, and each in turn came to remonstrate with her. She scarcely made a pretense of listening to these remonstrances, and replied to them all in the same words:

"What you say may be true; but I won't live on in this house with Mr. Smaile. I am going to leave home."

Aunt Pillar, with her brutal practicality, was the first person who confronted Miriam with the simple question: "And what are you going to live on? Your own twenty pounds a year, I suppose? You won't manage very well on that. I doubt you'll have to come back to living with your mother and old Smaile before long."

"I'd rather starve," said Miriam recklessly.

"You've not tried it yet," was Aunt Pillar's grimly true retort.

TO THE STARS

Thus brought to book, Miriam faced the difficulties of her position. She had, as Aunt Pillar said, twenty pounds a year of her own; she had also made a certain amount by the obnoxious contributions to *The Advance Guard*; but she was too level-headed to suppose for a moment that she could support herself by writing, especially if she tried to do so.

"Perhaps if I knew my living didn't depend upon it, and if I might take my own time over the work, I might make money; but never if I felt I was dependent on it," she said to herself.

The only thing to be done then was to get her mother to consent to give her enough to live upon. Miriam called in the help of a solicitor, who managed their small money affairs, and represented to him that it was impossible for her to live at home, and impossible for her, as yet, to support herself; could he prevail upon Mrs. Sadler to allow her fifty pounds a year to live upon in London? Mrs. Sadler's income was two hundred and fifty pounds, not princely, but as Miriam represented to the solicitor, if her board were removed from the household expenses, surely she might have fifty pounds to live upon elsewhere? It did not seem much to ask of a parent, as the solicitor agreed; but the question was whether the parent would see this? Not so long ago Mrs. Sadler had, equally with Aunt Pillar, refused her daughter the means to go away from home to study; how was it to be supposed that she would consent to this new scheme? Miriam lived through several weeks of horrible suspense; then, as is often the case, help came from where it was least expected. But she would not have

THE LADDER

been flattered if she could have heard the conversation between her mother and Mr. Smaile which decided her fate.

"Well, Priscilla, have you come to any agreement with this daughter of yours?"

"Oh, no, indeed; how could I come to any decision? She's been and consulted Mr. Banks, the solicitor!"

"Well, Priscilla, if you take my advice you *get rid of Miriam as soon as possible*. There will be no peace in the house with her in it. I advise you to let her go."

"But fifty pounds a year is a large sum, and everything so expensive nowadays!"

"Peace is cheap at fifty pounds, Priscilla; let the girl go. We will do very well on your two hundred pounds and my hundred and fifty put together. Let her go and welcome."

Here Mrs. Sadler began to shed a few natural tears at the thought of her daughter's departure. Moreover, she began to see other lions in the way. Where was Miriam to go? Who would look after her? She was so self-willed, so unlike other young women of her age.

"You have cousins in Maida Vale, have you not, Priscilla?" Mr. Smaile suggested. But this suggestion was impracticable.

"To be sure I have; but the girl don't get on so well with her cousins in Hindcup that she should get on better with cousins in Maida Vale," wailed Mrs. Sadler. Still, the main point had been decided by this conversation, and that night Mrs. Sadler told Miriam she might have fifty pounds a year ("all through the

TO THE STARS

goodness of Mr. Smaile”), if she could live on that sum.

Miriam, pending this decision, had been corresponding with Delia Gore on the practical side of the case. Delia suggested that an old maid of her aunt’s would take Miriam to board with her. Cochrane was the woman’s name, and Delia vouched for her entire respectability. Her terms would be low, and her house was comfortable.

Miriam had even written to Cochrane and found out that she would be glad to receive her. So, when Mrs. Sadler announced her decision, she had a plan to unfold. Her mother received it coldly, and went off to consult with Maggie Broadman about it.

“There’s really no saying *what* Miriam mayn’t do now,” Maggie said, shaking her head. “Going off, no one knows where, to live with no one knows who, and write no one knows what.” But Aunt Pillar contradicted one clause of this indictment.

“I know Cochrane,” she said. “She was maid to old Lady Gore of Replands; one of them Scotch women as haven’t too many manners, but a good head and a good heart. Miriam will do well enough with her. She refused Jenkins, the Gores’ old butler. I never knew why. He retired on his money after being thirty-five years in the family, and set up a temperance hotel in Victoria somewhere. Well, it was then he made Cochrane an offer, and she wouldn’t have him, and she’ll die an old maid.”

It was something to know this impeccably respectable life-history of the woman with whom Miriam proposed to lodge; but it was, indeed, impossible, as

THE LADDER

Maggie had said, to foretell what she might choose to write. "It *must* be about us," the cousins agreed. And Emmie, who was more simple than her sisters, and had more quickly forgiven Miriam's former offense, tried to make her swear silence as to her and Dr. Pratt's affairs.

"Won't you *promise* not to write all about me and Sydney?" she entreated. "Sydney says he always knows you are taking notes of what he says, and if you published all about our courtship, all I've told you, I wouldn't know where to look."

"Oh, don't be afraid, Emmie; I won't write anything about you," said Miriam; and actually kissed the empty little face that looked up so entreatingly.

But when it was definitely settled that she must leave Hindcup, Miriam felt some twinges of homesickness. When the old church bells broke suddenly into a crash of delicious sound, or as she counted the heavy strokes of the clock that measured out the hours of the placid Hindcup days, a rush of tears would come to her eyes; for home is home.

London seemed far away and strange—her only friends in it the Gores and Max Courteis, and she must not be too dependent on either of them. Would it be possible for her to make some sort of foothold for herself? And then, while these fears were crowding over her mind, came a letter from Delia Gore which added a new fear. Delia was going abroad with her uncle, and would not be in London at all that year.

"So," thought Miriam, "I shall practically be alone. I shall never see Mr. Gore when Delia is away, and what are Mr. and Mrs. Courteis to me?" Thus it

TO THE STARS

happens often in life. We say "This or that one will help me," "This or that circumstance will aid me," and again and again we are flung back upon ourselves, surprised and diffident, to learn the hard lesson of self-dependence.

THE LADDER

CHAPTER XXIX

COCHRANE, the maid who had so rashly and proudly refused a butler, lived in that region made classic by the residence there of the Carlyles. Her house was very small and dark, but not dismal, because it was old and had none of the vulgarities of jerry building. Cochrane met Miriam at the door on the afternoon of her arrival—a dark February afternoon it was—and held out her hand in welcome. She was a tall woman, and had a curious way of always looking down, even when she addressed one, yet there was nothing furtive in her appearance; the dropped lids only gave her an inscrutable expression.

“I wonder why she refused the butler?” Miriam thought, as they went into the dark little parlor together.

“You’ll be ready for tea,” said Cochrane. “It’s a tiresome journey from Hindcup; I used to take it many a time long ago; and how is Mrs. Pillar?”

Miriam sat by the fire and sipped her tea, and felt less forlorn. The sound of her aunt’s well-known name was reassuring.

“Oh, Aunt Pillar is quite well,” she said. “She asked me to give you her ‘regards.’” Unintentionally she spoke with a satirical intonation which did not escape her listener. Cochrane looked up for just a moment, and then let her eyelids drop again.

TO THE STARS

"You haven't been getting on very well at home of late, I hear?" she said. Miriam did not know whether to be glad or sorry that her character had been sent before her in this way. She concluded that it was perhaps best that Cochrane should understand how things stood.

"I have been getting on very badly," she admitted.

"Well, I hope you'll succeed in what you've set out to do. I don't like to see young people disappointed. Mrs. Pillar wrote me that you had been writing for magazines; she seemed not very well pleased about it."

"Yes," said Miriam. "They were all displeased."

"And you think it will be better to live alone and write, than be comfortably at home with your mother?"

"I can't be comfortable at home now."

"Home's home," said Cochrane laconically; and she added: "But I always think young people should be allowed to try their own way; there's no getting experience secondhand."

It did not sound encouraging; but something about the woman breathed a certain unspoken sympathy to Miriam. Cochrane rose and laid down her cup, saying:

"I was young myself once, and I don't forget it. We all make our mistakes. Well, if you're ready, I'll show you your room upstairs." She preceded Miriam up the steep little staircase, and showed her into a pleasant south-looking room. There was an old-fashioned tent bed in one corner, and a table in the window.

"That was one of her ladyship's beds at Replands,"

THE LADDER

said Cochrane, pausing and taking one of the faded chintz hangings in her hand almost lovingly. "That and the chest of drawers both came from Replands; they give a fine look to the room. Well, I hope you'll be comfortable. I'll leave you to unpack now."

Miriam did not unpack at once, however. She sat down by the window and gazed out at the roofs, and wondered what life would bring her in this little back-water of a house. She wondered if she had been a fool to come here.

"How can I write anything worth while?" she asked herself bitterly. "None of my poor little experiences are worth putting down on paper. If God, who holds life in His hand, would send me some of the great experiences that other people have, I might then do something with them. But now I am like a sharp knife that has nothing to cut."

Well, at any rate, she thought, she had set her feet free by this break with home. It would now be possible to regulate her life as she chose, to do what she thought right herself, and what it seemed worth while to do. She took out her little blank book, in which so many resolutions had been recorded, and wrote down her thoughts:

"I am going in future to regulate my life and conduct entirely by what I believe to be right, without reference to what other people believe to be right. For it seems to me that we are too apt to live by rote, going along commonly accepted lines, instead of thinking out what we individually believe to be the best way of living. I go to church, for instance, not because I earnestly believe it right to do so, but because most

TO THE STARS

so-called respectable people are in the habit of going there. In future I shall not go to church unless I earnestly long to do so, and believe that there I shall see God."

This revolutionary programme filled Miriam's soul with a sort of solemn joy. Farther on she wrote:

"To walk straightforward surely must always be right; to follow our inner voice, instead of the voice of other people. The worst sin that I seem to myself to be in danger of committing is wasting life; not making the best of it. I may never be able to do anything in the least valuable; but if I have honestly attempted all I can, I need not be ashamed to give in the account of my stewardship. The story of the unjust steward has always thrilled me; I have never heard the words 'Give an account of thy stewardship' without the strangest feeling of longing. Oh, how I wish to give in my account! My whole connections are blaming me just now; calling me unnatural and wrong-headed. I should not care; I am doing the best I see to do."

But Miriam was to find that it was not so easy as she imagined to live without reference to other people's ideas. How familiar it seemed on Sunday morning to hear Cochrane say to her:

"What church do you propose to attend? Perhaps you will come with me. I go to the City Temple." It cost her quite a pang to reply as she did:

"I do not think I shall go to church at all just now. I am not sure that I approve of churches, and until I see clearly on the subject I shall stay at home."

THE LADDER

"Ahem! well, perhaps you're right; but I've never got any *harm* at the City Temple," was Cochrane's rejoinder.

"That's a negative way of putting it," laughed Miriam. She stood at the window and watched Cochrane walk away down the little street. A feeling of slight vacancy came over her. What would she do with herself for the next two or three hours? Just then a messenger boy came along, ran up the steps and rattled a letter into the box, and gave a huge pull at the door bell. The little maidservant, who was dressing for church, flew downstairs like a whirlwind, and appeared at the parlor door a minute later with a letter, which she handed to Miriam.

She opened the note in some surprise. It was from Max Courteis, begging her to come to their house that afternoon.

"There will be a lot of clever people here, people you won't meet every day in Hindcup; no, nor in London, either. I've asked a friend of ours, Mrs. Hughes, to drive you here; she will call for you at four o'clock, and take you home, too. Be sure to come," Courteis wrote.

Oh, delightful, delightful! to get away from her solitary musings and her intercourse with the austere Cochrane, into this interesting, clever world! Miriam was beginning to have more confidence in herself, so she did not tremble as of yore at the prospect of "a lot of people."

She gave a random thought to her clothes; but since Delia's reformation, her dress had been much more presentable, so even this caused her no annoy-

TO THE STARS

ance. When Cochrane returned from church she found Miriam quite animated.

"I am going to the Courtesies' this afternoon," she said; "it will be interesting."

"What would your mother say to Sunday outings?" Cochrane asked severely.

"I am afraid she would not approve of them," Miriam admitted. "But I—don't you think one should do what one thinks right one's self? not what other people approve?"

"My stars! You are a queer girl," Cochrane exclaimed. "And perhaps you're in the right. I wonder could I do your hair better for you?"

"Oh, thank you. But isn't it all right?" Miriam said absently.

"No, it's all wrong. I used to do their hair for half of the young ladies that came to Replands. Her ladyship had half a dozen young nieces too poor to have maids, and I always did my best for every one of them. Her ladyship always said it was me made the match between Miss Elsie and Mr. Parke. Miss Elsie had but a poor head of hair, but I made the most of it. Well, shall I try my hand on you?"

As she spoke, the good woman stepped up to Miriam and passed a professional hand over her hair.

"Just stiff with hairpins—tut, tut! and pulled that tight and straight back! Come upstairs, and I'll make a different head of it. Not that I'm one that approves of Sunday outings, mind, but let young people have their chances, I say."

"When I was with Miss Gore," Miriam said, submitting her head into Cochrane's hands, "she did my

THE LADDER

hair for me once, and made me look almost pretty; but I can't manage it myself."

"Tut, tut! I'll soon teach you. Yes, it's mostly dressing that makes half the ladies in society. Dress them badly, and let them do their hair like yours, and no one would look at them twice. Come a bit nearer the light, please. I'd like to see you able to make the most of yourself; another of the long hairpins, please. There! You're another woman altogether!"

She held the glass to Miriam as she spoke, and stepped backward to survey her handiwork.

The girl looked at herself solemnly.

"It's beautiful," she said; "and thank you very much for doing it; but I must rely on what is inside my head to please people, if I can do so. I shall never learn to make the most of myself."

"Well, I've had a heap to do with the dressing of ladies, in my day," mused Cochrane. "And sometimes I've thought that a lady owed everything to her appearance, and another time I've thought them things mattered no more than that." She snapped her fingers contemptuously.

"Yes, I expect it's the mind that really matters most," said Miriam.

Cochrane sat down and looked at her.

"Miss Sadler," she said, "I knew your Aunt Pillar, and I've seen your mother, and I want to know where you get your ideas from? I thought when Mrs. Pillar wrote to me, that it would only be an obligation to her to put you up for a time, for, thinks I, 'set her up with her writing and dear knows what, I won't stand her for long.' But you're different, some-

TO THE STARS

how, from what I expected. You're superior to your class, *and I'm glad you should be*. You're not set up nor disagreeable. It's the queerest thing I've ever seen, and now you've hit the nail on the head with this you say—*it's the mind makes the difference*."

"Oh, don't say that, please," Miriam cried. She felt it awkward to be thus labeled as superior to her own people.

"It's true, all the same," Cochrane persisted. "And I wonder what the end will be. Well, there's a ring at the door bell. It will be your friend in her carriage. See have you got a pocket handkerchief, and what about gloves?"

Satisfied on these points, Cochrane watched Miriam downstairs, and then stood at the window until the carriage had driven away.

"Mrs. Pillar's niece and Mrs. Sadler's daughter!" she muttered to herself.

THE LADDER

CHAPTER XXX

It would be hard to say whether this afternoon contained more pleasure or pain for Miriam.

There were, as Courteis had said there would be, many people at his house who were not to be met with every day. Miriam gazed at them with profound interest, and felt it a great privilege to be allowed to speak to them. But, alas! in the course of conversation, she came up in herself against that sort of bed-rock of ignorance which is the sad inheritance of the uncultivated classes. "I have nothing but my wits to trust to," she thought sorrowfully, unheeding the fact that culture may be acquired and wits never can be. Depressed by this sense of her own ignorance on points that seemed a matter of every-day life to other people, she shrank into herself and looked and listened instead of speaking.

There were several very clever, well-dressed women there, brilliant talkers, after a fashion—a fashion that Miriam had never heard before. She listened to their scintillations with surprise and admiration. Several times her opinion was asked for upon some new book or play, and each time she replied gravely that she knew nothing about what they were discussing.

Then Courteis came to her assistance.

"Those who write books should never be expected to read them," he said. "Miss Sadler is too busy writ-

TO THE STARS

ing down her thoughts for our amusement to read what other people have written to amuse her, isn't that it?"

But Miriam would not accept his aid. She shook her head.

"No, Mr. Courteis. I am afraid that isn't it at all. I have not had many opportunities of reading new books; that is why I know so little about them," she said, turning bravely to the little knot of listeners. She would not sail under false colors anywhere.

"What a blessing!" ejaculated Courteis, and made them all laugh; but somehow Miriam did not appreciate the blessedness of her ignorance at that moment. She would have forfeited all her native intelligence and power of observation for that capacity for glib, smart utterance on current subjects which the women beside her possessed. They seemed to her to be amazingly clever and original, whereas their cleverness was quite unoriginal, a sort of trick merely, caught and kept up between them.

Mrs. Hughes, the lady who had driven Miriam there, was specially lively. She was a plain, sallow little woman, but extraordinarily vivacious, and a breeze of laughter always followed her speeches.

"How delightful it would be to be vivacious," Miriam thought enviously. "I see all the ridiculous side of things, but I can't make other people see them when I speak; I need to write them down; I am as solemn as an owl when I talk."

Mrs. Hughes chose to be very agreeable to Miriam. She complimented her on her clever work in *The Ad-*

THE LADDER

vance Guard, and begged her to come and see her at her own home.

"You must come and teach me to think instead of talking and reading," she said, with a vivacious glance at Courteis. "You must come to me next Sunday."

Miriam felt an instant wish to refuse the invitation, but she did not know very well how to do so.

"Thank you, you are very kind," she said primly, and then felt sure that Mrs. Hughes would mimic her precise tones when she got home. She had heard her mimicking some dear friend a few minutes before.

Just at that moment the door was thrown open, and a man came in whom everyone turned to look at. It seemed to Miriam that she had seen him before, and yet she did not know who he was. His eyes were so large and black as to look almost frightful in his boyish face, which had an expression of painful concentration.

"Who is it?" she asked Mrs. Hughes.

"Why, it's Herman, of course. Have you never heard him play?" she answered incredulously.

"Oh, I should have remembered; the man in the picture, of course," Miriam said, turning round to compare it with the original as she spoke. When she looked round again, Mrs. Hughes had left her seat, and darted across the room to where Herman stood; then, with the air of one who has caught her prey, she led him to a corner and began to talk to him. Miriam was near enough to hear what they said, though it was all Greek to her; it was about music, the names of unknown musicians—unknown to her—criticisms of their work, and so on. The criticisms were very clever,

TO THE STARS

and showed a great knowledge of music, had Miriam known enough to understand them; but she did not.

She listened, however, with profound and envious admiration of this woman's knowledge and cleverness, wondering where she had learned it all. But suddenly she noticed that Herman was not listening to a word that was said to him; and then he spoke out across the room to his host, in a sweet, foreign-sounding voice:

"Max! Max! I will play for you, if you wish."

Mrs. Hughes, for a moment, looked incredibly offended, then she crossed over to where Miriam sat and settled herself beside her on the sofa, saying in a purring voice:

"Now we shall really enjoy ourselves. He's a wonderful, wonderful creature, though he has such terrible manners. I suppose they are one of the penalties of genius."

Herman had sent for his violin, and was picking away at the strings in an offhand way, as he waited for the accompanist to get ready. He looked around at the people gathered before him, in the funny, unconcerned manner of a man who has lived constantly before the public. Now and then he allowed his eyes to rest curiously on one face or another for a moment, but generally he passed them over with as little remark as if they were so many chairs.

When the tuning-up was finished he began to play. Miriam had, of course, never heard anything like it in her whole life. The technical skill of this incomparable artist was entirely lost upon her supreme ignorance; but perhaps, for that very reason, the mean-

THE LADDER

ing of the music seemed extraordinarily plain to her. While other people marveled over the impossibilities of his bowing, she heard what it expressed. She did not understand all the difficulties that were being overcome by these clever fingers; but she knew that this man was expressing through this medium a thousand things she had felt and never been able to say. She listened and listened, and drop after drop two great tears splashed down upon her dress, yet she never knew that she was weeping.

The music stopped, and Mrs. Hughes began to say something very clever and apposite about it, just what most people would have liked to say if they had known how to; but Herman did not listen to a word that she said. He walked straight up to where Miriam sat, and stood before her, violin in hand.

"This lady understands," he said. "This is the critique I like; look there!" He pointed down with his bow to the tear-stain on Miriam's dress, and she, overwhelmed with confusion, did not know where to turn—the eyes of the whole room were on her.

"I will play again—for these tears," said Herman. He turned away abruptly, took up his violin and played a few notes, and Miriam felt that observation was removed from her. Courteis nodded and smiled across the room to reassure her. Mrs. Hughes bent forward and whispered into her ear:

"How I wish I could cry easily like that; so effective!"

Cry easily! thought Miriam. How little the woman knew! These tears had flowed for all manner of nameless griefs of the spirit.

TO THE STARS

The music stopped. Again Herman came across to where Miriam sat.

"Well! you enjoyed it?" he asked. He stood beside her, smiling, still holding his violin in his hand.

"Yes, completely," she answered.

"May I sit down here?" he said. The remark was so rude that Miriam did not know what to say, for it implied that Mrs. Hughes should give up her chair to Herman—there was no other. "Mrs. Hughes will talk her clever talk to Courteis, while we speak of stupid things together," he said, smilingly accepting the chair, which Mrs. Hughes rather hurriedly vacated. She fussed away, leaving Miriam and Herman alone. He turned and looked at her.

"Why did you cry for this little thing?" he asked.

"Because it said what I have felt so often," she answered. Herman held his violin on his knee, and for a moment he did not speak, but sat plucking ever so gently at the strings of it; it gave out a faint humming sound under his fingers. Then he looked up and laughed.

"Yes, it is my felicity to express what other men only feel," he said.

"How did you learn?" Miriam asked breathlessly.

"Learn?" Herman cried, turning suddenly, almost angrily, to her. "Learn it! It is me—I—whichever you call it. Me—me—in me here. I do not need to learn." He struck his hand against his breast with a passionate gesture. "I feel, I express—the two go hand in hand!"

"But," Miriam objected, "you cannot have felt everything; yet to-day I have felt you express so much

THE LADDER

—things” (she hesitated, and then added) “—things I thought only I had felt.”

“There is not much that I cannot express,” he said. Courteis passed near them just then, and Herman called to him, as he had done before.

“Max! Max! come here!” and when Courteis paused beside them, he added: “Who am I speaking to? She understands many things.”

Courteis laughed. “Miss Miriam Sadler—a name not yet known to fame, Herman, but on the way to it.”

Herman turned and looked at Miriam inquiringly; but he did not ask by what avenue she was going to reach the temple of Fame.

“If you like to hear me play again you shall do so. Max, I shall send tickets to your wife and this lady; they shall go together to hear me if they choose.”

“Oh!” cried Miriam, “how I should like that!”

“What would you like so much?” said a voice at her elbow. It was Mrs. Hughes, who had apparently come to take Miriam away, for she was drawing on her gloves, and Mrs. Courteis stood limply beside her, waiting to bid her good-by.

“To hear him play again,” Miriam answered.

Herman cast a frightfully scowling glance at Mrs. Hughes, and turned away, saying over his shoulder:

“You shall have the tickets, Miss Sadler.”

Mrs. Hughes bade farewell to her host and hostess then, and took Miriam off. As they drove along she said in her subacid way:

“You should be elated, Miss Sadler, the great Herman was so amiable to you; but did you ever see such

TO THE STARS

manners?" Like many of her sex, Mrs. Hughes never allowed another woman to suppose her charms were remarkable; so, after having admitted that Herman had been amiable, she hastily added:

"Report says he is very susceptible, of course; but one can never tell the truth about celebrities."

"I suppose not," Miriam agreed. The woman of the world, when she feels herself attacked in this subtle way, has all her weapons of defense ready in a moment. But Miriam's case was far other from this. She felt vaguely that Mrs. Hughes meant to be disagreeable, and the only effect this had was to make her awkward and silent. Her silence provoked her companion to further waspishness.

"I wonder if he will remember anything about those tickets he was so lavish with?" she said.

"Only time can show that," the girl responded.

"I wouldn't set my heart on it, if I were you," Mrs. Hughes suggested kindly. "Ten to one he never remembers anything about it." The remark irritated Miriam. It seemed to imply that she was counting unduly upon Herman's promise.

Having shot this arrow, Mrs. Hughes now wished to be agreeable, and again made allusion to next Sunday afternoon; but Miriam had decided to refuse this invitation.

"I shall write to you about it," she said, as she got out of the carriage at Cochrane's door.

Supper was laid in the little parlor when she came in, and Cochrane was there waiting for her. She went upstairs and took off her walking dress, and then they sat down to supper.

THE LADDER

"Well, and did you enjoy your afternoon?" Cochrane inquired.

Miriam was silent for a minute.

"It was very eventful for me," she said slowly; "but I am not fit really for clever society like that."

"They must think you fit or they wouldn't ask you," said Cochrane.

"'Thou hast a name that thou livest, but art dead,' " Miriam quoted. "I have written two or three cleverish things, and they think I will write more, that is all. It is silly of them. I have not done enough; I never will, if I begin to count upon the little things I have done."

Cochrane looked at her in surprise. "Well, I must say you are a remarkable young woman," she said; "and to think that you are own niece to Mrs. Pillar; she that was so taken up with jams and jellies and servants' allowances, and what not!"

"That was her world. I have mine. It is all what one happens to be interested in," was Miriam's answer, an answer which didn't in the least solve the puzzle.

TO THE STARS

CHAPTER XXXI

MIRIAM's days very soon fell into a routine of extraordinary invariability. The morning hours she devoted entirely to reading. She had long ago returned her first supply of books to Alan Gore; but, spite of resolutions to the contrary, had not been able to resist his kind offer of another supply, for she felt it pleasanter to read from his books than from any other copies of the same works. Monotonous days are really those which produce the events of the intellectual life. In the stillness and intense application of these hours, Miriam was laying up a store of knowledge such as she had never hoped to have leisure to acquire. After reading all morning, she went out in the afternoon, generally escorted by Cochrane, who consented rather unwillingly to be her guide to the historical bits of old London that she delighted to visit. Being, however, an obliging woman, Cochrane never refused to go on these exploring expeditions, and even began to take a certain interest in them.

In the evening Miriam always went up to her own room and tried to write. Even if she failed, the employment was a joy to her, as she told herself over and over again. It was a lonely, unhuman sort of life for a young person to live, shut in thus to books and ideas, with little or no contact with the living world. Delia Gore had gone abroad, and in her absence Miriam

THE LADDER

never hoped to see Alan Gore. In the whole of London, Mr. and Mrs. Courteis were her only acquaintances, and she did not care much for either of them. Still, she was glad to have their house to go to, and glad to meet there people who interested her; it kept her from feeling too lonely.

"I wish you had more diversion," Cochrane said one morning, looking fixedly at the girl. "Young people can have too much of their own thoughts."

Miriam laughed.

"Well, Mrs. Courteis is going to take me to hear Herman, the violinist, play to-morrow," she said; "so you should be pleased."

For the tickets had come, in spite of Mrs. Hughes's insinuations to the contrary, and Mrs. Courteis, in her lackluster way, had written to suggest that they should go together to the concert. When the evening came Miriam could have wished for a more joyous companion, one who seemed to care to hear the music, or who even cared to look at the audience—Mrs. Courteis did neither, but leaned back in her seat, huddled in a tashed-looking opera cloak, and yawned repeatedly.

"I'm sure I wish the audience would let him be done. Did you ever hear anything so tiresome as these encores?" she remarked.

"Oh, but he is so wonderful! Do you not wish to hear him again?" Miriam exclaimed. She had leaned forward, flushed with excitement, to catch every note that Herman played, and now, forgetful of her apathetic companion, she cried out in the fullness of her heart:

"Think what it would be to have a means of expres-

TO THE STARS

sion such as he has! to be able to compel the world to listen!"

Mrs. Courteis did not crave for expression apparently, for she only shrugged her shoulders at Miriam's enthusiasm, and said there was a draught in the hall.

"I have heard him play so often," she explained. "He is constantly at our house. You had better come and meet him again some day, if he interests you. Indeed, I am rather tired of these geniuses my husband is so fond of; but I suppose they are new to you." She was a good-natured woman, in her vapid way, and the sight of the girl's enthusiasm rather amused her.

"Come and dine with us on Thursday," she said. "I heard my husband ask him that day. It might interest you."

Miriam accepted the invitation gladly.

"I can assure you that I am not tired of geniuses," she said.

"He won't be at dinner," Mrs. Courteis pursued. "I never give dinners; one needs to be so particular about the food; so people only come in to our house in the evenings; but I don't mind asking you, Miss Sadler; I don't imagine you will mind much about what you eat."

A little more knowledge of the Courteises' household made Miriam understand this rather limp invitation. It was always at sixes and sevens, the meals were unpunctual and indifferently served, and Mrs. Courteis never seemed to take any interest in how things were done. Yet, in spite of all this, or perhaps just because of it, people came to the house in streams; the shabby drawing-room was never empty, and no one

THE LADDER

refused to drink the indifferent coffee that was served there.

This was because there was no feeling of effort about such hospitality as the Courteises offered. People might come, if they chose; they would not get much food for the body, but there was always plenty of good company to be had.

On the Thursday evening appointed, Miriam ate of the ill-cooked dinner, and then they went into the drawing-room to wait for anyone who chose to appear that evening. Quite a number of people came, and each time the door opened, she looked up expecting to see Herman come in. When at last he came, the room was full of people and buzzing with talk. He stood in the doorway scowling at the crowded room—a scowl that sat ill on his boyish face—then came forward to speak to Mrs. Courteis. His words were not excessively polite.

“There are too many people here to-night; why has Max told me to come to-night?” he said.

“Oh, the people won’t hurt you,” said his hostess in the soothing voice she would have used to a child. “Here is Miss Sadler, whom you sent the tickets to; come and speak to her.” Herman looked round at Miriam, and then came up to where she stood, smiling so charmingly that she could not believe it was the same man who had stood scowling in the doorway a minute before.

“Come; this is better,” he said. “Let us sit here and talk; for it seems to me that we speak the same language.”

It seemed so to Miriam also, for she found herself

TO THE STARS

speaking to him without a shadow of constraint or shyness in a very short time. That freemasonry which exists between all artists, whatever their medium of expression may happen to be, made itself felt between them.

"There are so many hindrances to all one tries to do," she said. "I have had so many hindrances of circumstance—" She paused, wondering if Herman understood. He looked at her in a surprised way.

"They have never existed for me, these hindrances of circumstance that you speak of," he said. "Circumstance?" He ended his sentence on an interrogative note. Miriam was almost provoked.

"Well," she said, "have your circumstances always been so propitious?"

"I never thought; let me consider; what is this you call propitious? I was the son of a peasant; he used to play the flute, and I cried for it before I knew one note from another. And I grew older and learned the notes, and got a little fiddle of my own, and made new tunes, because the old ones were not enough for me; and I made more, and men heard them and wanted to hear them again, and I made more and more; all came to me as easily as the birds sing. Then I wanted to learn skill, and I learned skill." He spread out his fine hands toward Miriam in explanation, feeling down the length of his fingers as he spoke.

"This, too, I have by nature, a curious facility. But then I wanted to feel, and this is the hard labor of the artist. We live by our emotions; we dare not starve them, or our art suffers."

Miriam, looking into his face, thought to herself that

THE LADDER

he had indeed lived by his emotions; it was so young and yet so passionate.

"What do you call starving your emotions?" she asked curiously.

"I do not grudge myself pleasure, and I do not dread pain," he said. "I do not question, 'Is this pleasure right or wrong?' For me all emotion is right. This is my work, to feel, so that I may express. This is my conscience, and this only."

Miriam was intensely interested, though a chord of hereditary conscience thrilled somewhere deep down in her heart, and said, "False morals." Still the theory had its attractions. She had thought a great deal round this very subject, but had never heard anyone profess the doctrine quite so plainly.

"Then you mean that things which are generally held to be wrong for most of the world would not be wrong for the artist?" she asked.

"I say whatever furthers his instinct is right for him. I do not speak of other men, I speak for myself."

Looking at and listening to him, Miriam half believed what he said to be true. Art like his, she thought, would justify any conduct; but how bewildering it all was, this conflict of art and morality; must they always be divorced? Herman seemed to read her thoughts; he looked at her and laughed, tossing back the lock of hair that tumbled across his eyes.

"Behold me!" he laughed. "I stand before kings now, and what has gained me all this? I live and live. Why do the people long to hear me? Because I have so much to tell, I who have felt so much. I lift them

TO THE STARS

out of their dull lives into places of strange emotion they know nothing of. I went once to play in the Provinces; you should have seen my audience; such quiet country folk came from distances to hear me, and old ladies—so many. I played—but no, the names are only names to you—” He paused and laughed again.

“You need not tell me the names; tell me what you played *about*,” Miriam said.

“Things they were ignorant of. I see them now, so stiff and cold and proper, till I played them off their seats on to their feet to wave their handkerchiefs for me!”

“Then you think people like to hear things they know nothing about?” Miriam asked. “Why, if that is true, they will never care to hear me, all my subjects are so hackneyed and well known. I only know about humdrum days such as half the world lives.”

“There!” Herman cried; “there! You try to make rules for Art, Art that knows no rule. I spoke of my secret only. Yours will be different, and another’s different again, and it is never the same.”

Miriam sat silent for a minute, and then she said, “Thank you,” in a quiet voice. The words made Herman laugh again.

“You thank me,” he said. “But you know all about it already. You need only confidence—to trust your instinct. Let it work and produce what it chooses, and the world will listen. I like in you your understanding heart—that few have.”

“But I know nothing. I did not understand one word of all the clever things that Mrs. Hughes said to you that Sunday.”

THE LADDER

"This Mrs. Hughes talks like a clever parrot. She knows everything and understands nothing. You are the opposite; you understand everything and know nothing."

What Miriam knew at that moment was, that she had for the first time met a fellow artist. She distinguished in her own mind between him and the other two clever men she knew—Alan Gore and Max Courteis. They had intellect and cultivation; but this man was different from either of them; he did the things that the other two only understood and admired. To *do*—ah, that was it! She could not look at Herman and name him a good man; but that he was great was undeniable; he had that worshipful faculty of doing supremely what other men could not even attempt. She regarded him curiously; had he not attained to his heaven already?—reached the stars that Alan Gore told her no one ever reached.

"Are you satisfied, happy, you who have attained to perfection?" she asked him suddenly.

"I satisfied! I attained to perfection! The woman is mad to ask me such a question," Herman exclaimed. "Happy!" he paused and added slowly: "I have tasted great success; but this happiness—joy, ecstasy, felicity—they are names to me. I have not touched the fringe of them. Some men must have felt them, for have they not invented words to express them? But not I; they are dead names to me."

"Oh!" said Miriam, drawing in her breath with a long sigh. It was true, then, what Courteis said to her long ago, that not one person in a thousand knew the meaning of these beautiful terms! Herman

TO THE STARS

sat covering his eyes with his hand, and did not speak again. He seemed to have forgotten her presence. After a minute or two of silence he rose and held out his hand to her.

“I must go. I wish you good-by. I shall see you again when I return to London in May. Good-by.”

He was gone; and no one in the room seemed to be worth speaking to now, she thought.

THE LADDER

CHAPTER XXXII

SPRING came early that year, and May was a month of intense heat. The pavements seemed as if they would blister one's feet, so hot the asphalt had become, and the air felt like the blast from an oven door. Miriam sat indoors most of the day working. Sometimes her thoughts turned longingly to the fresh Hind-cup meadows, and she wondered if she was a fool to exile herself here in the breathless town, when she might be there in the delicious country. And then the thought of Mr. Smaile—now her mother's husband—made it impossible for her to think of home, and she would turn away from the beckoning memory of green fields and resume her work.

One of these days she met Herman again. It had been more than usually hot, and not a breath of air came in through the wide-open windows in the Courteises' dark, shabby drawing-room. Miriam stood close to the window, looking out at the smoke-blackened lilac bushes that grew in the garden below. She turned round with a start to find Herman standing beside her.

"Oh, you have come back again!" she said.

"Yes, to this inferno, where I must stay to earn my bread," he answered. "Feel this air, like soup. I am sick of this town to-day. I want the country fields.

TO THE STARS

On Saturday I wish to play a pastoral symphony filled with beautiful peace, and the peace is not in me. Where can you find it here in London?"

"Nowhere," said Miriam shortly. "Why do you not go into the country to look for it?"

"Will you come with me into this green country?" he asked suddenly, staring at Miriam with his great black eyes. The proposal was so unconventional that she did not know how to answer it.

"I should only bother you," she said evasively.

"I do not ask for the company of those who bother me. Say you will come," he urged.

Miriam knew perfectly well that she should not entertain the idea for a moment; but the suddenness of the temptation carried her away. How beautiful it would be to go into the country with Herman and talk to him, and hear him talk, and listen to his strange experiences! She dallied with the idea for a dangerous moment. Then her upbringing asserted itself and reproved the suggestion; and yet again a remembrance of her cousins and their contempt of her swept across her mind. What would they say if they could hear Herman urging her to come into the country with him?—Miriam, the woman of no account, whom they said no man cared to speak to! With incredible folly, her decision was made by this thought. She could go, she, too, could amuse herself; and better than any of them, if she chose!

"Yes," she said, "I'll come, and we will not talk one tiresome word all day long."

Herman was delighted.

"We will go into Hampshire. Once I was sent

THE LADDER

there when I was ill. I lived at the village inn. The place was divinely quiet, with this slow-running river, and such bright green fields. When shall we start? Not early, for I rise late; say, twelve o'clock, and the day Friday, and the station Waterloo."

"Only if the day is fine," said Miriam, to give herself a loophole of escape.

"Yes, if the sun shines; but it will; it shines often for me. But what is wrong? You do not altogether wish to come?"

"I do, indeed, but I do not know—" she began.

"If you should?—the old question! I have told you my creed, to do the thing that pleases me; this is the artist's food, his meat and drink."

"I will come," she said.

On Thursday night Miriam looked out and said to herself that it would probably rain the next morning. She rather wished that it would. But it did not rain.

"I must go!" she said to herself, half in pleasure, half in dismay.

At breakfast she told Cochrane of her plans for the day; but she did not mention Herman's name.

"I am going into the country to-day; I won't be home till eight o'clock," she said.

"I'll wait supper for you. But what's taking you to the country?" Cochrane asked.

"I feel as if I wanted some fresh air," said Miriam. She took a 'bus to the station, and as she jolted along she tried to tell herself that this expedition was quite wise.

"No one will ever know about it," she said; but

TO THE STARS

when she found herself standing beside Herman on the platform and noticed how people pointed him out and stared at him, she became increasingly uneasy.

"I forgot he was so well known," she thought, adding aloud to him:

"How people stare at us; do you not mind?"

"I? No; I'm accustomed," he said, with a little shrug. "Come, let us get into our carriage, and that will stop them."

Miriam, as you know, was not accustomed to much gilded luxury. She was surprised to see that Herman had engaged a carriage for themselves alone.

"Do you know," she said, "that I have never taken even a short journey in a first-class carriage before?"

"Did I, before I began to make my money?" he asked. "Now I cannot spend enough, so I have all luxuries. I take revenge on poverty, now that I have escaped from it. Come now and give me your simple tales of life; they make me amused."

The train moved out of the dingy station, out through the smutty, endless suburban streets, into the clean, green country. The air coming in through the carriage window smelled fresh and delightful. Miriam's spirits rose. After all, it was the first time in her life that she had done anything so amusing. Herman, too, was in the best of tempers. He wanted to hear all about her life at home and in London, and listened to these "simple tales" with a mixture of sympathy and amusement that beguiled her into easy narration. When the train stopped and they got out at the little country station, they felt curiously well acquainted.

THE LADDER

"Here I came last Easter when I was ill," he said. "I came so ill and left it so well. We shall lunch at the inn."

It was all gay and delightful. They sat at a little round table at the window of the inn, and Herman laughed and talked all the time, and in exchange for Miriam's simple annals, told her extraordinary stories of his short and brilliant past.

"They used to point me out in the streets when I was a boy, as I passed to my lessons. 'That is the wonderful little Herman,' they said. And then the first night when I played at Vienna"—he stopped and passed his hand across his eyes—"I think I hear the shouts still, the first I earned. I have heard many since then, but none like these!" Miriam's eyes brimmed up with sudden tears of sympathy, and Herman, looking at her, exclaimed, as if to a third person, "How she understands!"

He rose hastily, crumpling up his napkin on the table. "Come; we shall go and walk by the river; we waste the sunshine indoors."

They left the village behind them, and strolled off across the fields toward the river. It meandered along, almost level with its banks—one of those slow-running English streams the poets have sung from time immemorial, and yet the songs have not all been sung yet; fresh measures linger still in the gentle lapping of their waters.

Miriam stood among the flower-starred grass in ecstasy.

"There is an old hymn they sing in the meeting-house at Hindcup that is just like this," she said.

TO THE STARS

“‘Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood
Stand decked in living green.’

When I was a child I used to think I would have to wade through the river, and it frightened me, but the thought of the flowers on the other bank consoled me a little.”

They sat down by the edge of the river, and fell into talk almost as if they were old friends reunited. There seemed so much to hear, so much to tell. One of the divine attributes of humanity is its craving for sympathy: the lonely soul is ever incomplete, and on its solitary path is always watching for another soul that can bear it company.

There was something in Herman's passionately responsive nature that made it seem easy and natural for Miriam to talk to him of things which were too painful for her to mention to other people.

“It has been my fate to make friends in quite another rank from my own,” she told him; “and I sometimes wonder if it has given me more pleasure or pain.” Herman looked at her, a long, searching look, and nodded.

“You have loved a man of another rank, I think?” he said, without taking his eyes off her face as he asked the question.

“Oh, I have not allowed myself to love him!” Miriam cried; but in spite of herself her eyes filled with tears, and she gave a little sob that she could not stifle.

Herman nodded again.

“Do not regret it; but I know how it is with us, we who have imagination. It is not altogether the in-

THE LADDER

dividuals we love, it is what we imagine them to be. A thousand times I have cursed this imagination by which I live and am famous. You, too, will do the same; the price is heavy. But this is *you* and this is *me*, and wanting it, we would want our occupations, yours and mine."

Miriam looked up at his face, so young and cruelly expressive; a shadow seemed to have fallen across it, as dark as a thundercloud.

"What harm has imagination done you?" she asked him.

"I married a woman and thought her divine, as imaginative fools will; now I cannot bear to look at her."

"Oh," she said, "and you are so young!" Herman nodded in reply, and flung a stone into the river.

"I shall get rid of her some day," he said, "when I have time."

She looked at him in surprise. These were not the morals of Hindcup.

"Do you think that would be right?" she asked.

Herman seemed scarcely to understand her question. "Right?" he repeated. "I have told you what is right for me; this which furthers my art. She spoils it; she worries me. I shall be quit of her when I can."

Miriam almost envied the directness of his conviction, whether mistaken or not.

"Perhaps you are right," she said. "But, of course, I was brought up to think quite the other way."

"It is all quite simple for me," Herman said. "'Do you love her?' I ask, and my heart says 'No,' and there it ends. No love, no marriage for me."

"I wish you were happy," Miriam said earnestly.

TO THE STARS

"It seems all wrong that you who give so much pleasure to other people should not be happy yourself."

Herman laughed and shook his head.

"Come; we shall move on farther up the river," he said. "We came down here to search for peace and happiness, and instead we speak of the things which hurt us most. We shall stop such talk and go in search of peace."

THE LADDER

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE search proved to be a long one. At least they sauntered on by the river's bank, following its delicious meanderings, through field after field, till they came to where the water gathered in a great black pool, still and deep. Herman flung himself down on the bank and closed his eyes.

"I shall listen now," he said. "If one sits very still, sometimes the Earth speaks to one."

Miriam sat down and listened. Ever so many tiny, unnoticed sounds came to her ears. She began to count them. The ripple of the water, one; the sound of the breeze overhead, two; the rustle of the grasses, three; the chirrup of the grasshopper, four; the note of a bird, five; the cropping of a sheep near them, six; a fish jumping in the pool, seven. She wondered if Herman was counting the sounds also. He was lying on the grass, his hands clasped under his head, his eyes shut.

"I daresay he hears a great many that I am too stupid to notice," she thought. "I wish that I had perceptions like his; he enjoys sounds as I enjoy sights."

In the stillness a bird gave the most enchanting little note, almost conversational in its intelligence, and Herman smiled. Far away across the meadows the church clock struck five. Miriam started; she had not thought it was so late. She ventured to speak.

TO THE STARS

"Did you hear the clock strike? Should we not be turning back? There is some way to go," she said.

Herman opened his eyes, but did not stir.

"Go, then, if you wish to. How can you so interrupt me? I am learning," he said, so crossly that she drew in her breath in dismay: she was not accustomed to men of genius and their ways. Rather perturbed as to what was the best thing to do, she sat still for a little longer, and then rose without saying anything and walked slowly off in the direction of the village. Miriam knew that the London train left at half-past six, and it must now be well after five. There was a long way to be gone over before the village was reached, and trains, like tides, wait for no man. She looked back once or twice, but Herman did not stir; she lingered and loitered along, calculating the time as well as she could. Then at last Herman rose and came sauntering along. Surely even he could not be careless enough to forget the hour of the return train. Miriam waited till he came up, and then asked rather timidly about their return journey.

"It is nearly six o'clock, I am sure," she said.

"Is it?" Herman asked. "Can it be that you wear a watch? I cannot stand the feeling of one; something alive and ticking, such a little distracting beat in the pocket; it seems to play contrary motion to the beat of my heart. I never carry one. I take no note of time."

"But," said Miriam almost severely, "one must take note of time! Trains do not wait. Come; we must be quick."

"Oh, do not annoy yourself. Here we are very well

THE LADDER

in the country. Maybe we shall catch this train; but if not, then we shall be very well at the inn; I have money enough," he added absently, putting his hand into his pocket and bringing out a handful of sovereigns. "See, this would pay even in London, and country inns are cheap; do not worry."

"But you don't seem to see that I *must* get home to-night," the girl cried. "What would Cochrane think? She would think something had happened to me!"

"Oh, we shall send her a message," Herman said easily; "but we shall catch the train; without doubt we shall catch the train."

Miriam could not face, with any show of composure, the possibility of having to stay all night at the inn. She walked along in a perfect anguish of anxiety, counting every step they took. Field after field seemed to stretch before them, each longer than the last.

"Oh, do hurry!" she cried. And Herman laughed, and hurried to please her.

"We have to go to the inn for our wraps," he said, as they neared the village; "but we will catch the train, without doubt."

"Have you any idea what the exact hour of the train is?"

"Seven o'clock, I fancy. Pray do not vex so," he answered. "Even if we miss this valuable train, I have learned so much it has been well worth while."

Miriam saw that it was impossible for her to make him see her point of view; she could only hope for the

TO THE STARS

best. As they came in sight of the inn, they saw a puff of smoke at the station, and a minute later a train went steaming out in the London direction.

"Oh, I am sure that was our train!" she cried. "Oh, what shall we do?"

Herman went into the inn and made inquiries, while Miriam, wild with impatience, waited to hear the result. He came sauntering out to the door in a few minutes, opening a cigarette case and counting over its contents.

"Three, four, five, six—it is indeed true that we have lost the train, my friend," he said, "by but a few minutes. Come, let us sit in the porch while I smoke. I only fear I have not enough of these to last me comfortably over the night. It is my bad habit to smoke if I cannot sleep. Perhaps the country air will make me sleepy." He sat down and felt in his pockets for a match case; it was no matter to him, evidently, to have lost the train.

"Surely, *surely* there is another train to-night!" poor Miriam cried, in perfect despair and aggravation at his coolness.

She ran into the house, and sought out the landlady to explain to a feminine ear the perplexity she was in. But Mrs. Hicks could offer no comfort; it was impossible to get to London till the next morning. The woman was sorry for her, and came out to the door to discuss the difficulty with Herman.

"Why, sir," she said, "I'm sorry the lady's in such a way about it, but we'll do our best for you, sir. You'll have your old room, sir, and the lady—" She paused, and glanced at Miriam before she added in a

THE LADDER

tentative way: "You've gone and got married since Easter last, sir?"

"Not since Easter," said Herman, without moving a muscle. "I was married long before that." Mrs. Hicks could not understand Miriam's agonized blush, and was further perplexed when she cried out: "I am not Mrs. Herman; you are quite mistaken."

In discussing the situation a little later with her husband, Mrs. Hicks confessed herself completely in the dark.

"'Tisn't as if the young woman weren't *completely* respectable, George; she's not the other kind, not in the least. Yet she's left to 'erself, indeed, coming down into the country with him, as if they were man and wife, and 'im so musical, too!"

"Well, then," said George stoutly, "looks very much as if she weren't so respectable as you say."

"Lor' now, George! You go an' 'ave a look at her; see the flat heels to 'er shoes, and the plain looks of 'er clothes; she never were disrespectful, that one, never. But I'll say for it, she should be careful with 'im."

Miriam, in the meanwhile, had walked over to the post office and telegraphed the news of her involuntary delay to Cochrane. She felt happier after this was done. After all, Cochrane did not know that she was not alone, and would only commiserate her ill luck in missing the train. No harm would come of the adventure, in the end; no one could even hear about it.

"I suppose you very seldom have people stopping here?" she asked Mrs. Hicks.

"Scarcely anyone, miss—ma'am—I beg your par-

TO THE STARS

don," said Mrs. Hicks, not quite sure by which title to address this anomalous person; then, to cover her confusion, she went on to explain, "Scarcely a soul, unless 'tis a commercial gentleman now and again. We've one to-night; not that he'll disturb you at dinner, seein' as he only comes in late for an 'ot supper."

"Oh, nothing will disturb us," said Miriam, feeling not altogether sorry that the inn was so little frequented.

"We shall enjoy the evening," Herman said. "After we have dined we shall have a concert. Mrs. Hicks has once before borrowed for me a fiddle from the cobbler; she shall do it again, and I will play for the people. How they will enjoy it, you cannot think!" He laughed with pleasure; all his dull mood of the afternoon was gone. "Then, indeed, you shall know how clever I am," he said to Miriam, "when you hear me play on this little devil of a village fiddle!"

"I shall also learn how vain you are," said she demurely. Herman held out his hand toward her suddenly as if he wished her to examine it.

"See!" he cried. "See how it has been formed from the beginning for this; have *I* made it? I am not religious, I have not been at Mass or confession these dozen years, but I hold this from God; it is given to me only. I am not proud of myself, but of it—of the thing that is in me."

And Miriam, listening, understood and believed his words.

THE LADDER

CHAPTER XXXIV

HERMAN decreed that his concert was to be held in the kitchen, so that the stable men and laborers might come to hear him in their working dress.

So, after dinner, when the dusk was falling, he and Miriam went along to the kitchen where the audience was already assembled.

It was a large old room, with a stone-flagged floor, and a long window looking out into the yard. Men in stained corduroys and women in sunbonnets were standing there laughing and whispering. Herman came in among them all, so curiously different from them, holding the shabby little borrowed fiddle in his hand. He stood and looked round the room, amused and pleased by the rustic audience, while Miriam was given a chair in the place of honor by Mrs. Hicks. She noticed with keen interest the contrast presented by Herman and his audience; the faces crowding round him had, for the most part, that curious vacancy of expression that is so marked in the agricultural laborers of England. Life writes little on such faces, unless it is a look of almost animal suffering, or dull endurance of irremediable hardships. Among the younger women, some were comely enough, in their way, but it was an inexpressive comeliness; animal, too, in its entire dependence on youth and health. They smiled with wide red lips at the young men who

TO THE STARS

stood awkwardly beside them, and shouldered them as crowded cattle in a pen shoulder their companions.

And there among them Herman stood, erect and smiling, waiting for the shuffle of their feet to be quiet before he began to play. The poise of his figure was extraordinarily graceful as he stood among these untrained rustics, waiting with that incomparable composure of his for the noise to subside. His face, among their vacant faces, seemed to radiate expression; it became a point of interest to which every eye was drawn.

When silence was at last obtained, Herman spoke a word or two of explanation before he began to play.

"I will play to you to-night two love songs; the first the most hopeless I know, the second the happiest," he said.

Then he began to draw the most divinely simple, sobbing little tune out of the borrowed fiddle. In the silence you could have heard the proverbial pin fall. Not the most untrained listener in the room could misunderstand what the tune said—it was a bit of the universal language that all men know. The happy tune which followed was so happy that a ripple of laughter passed over the crowd, and Miriam laughed with them in admiration and delight.

Herman played on thus, one thing after another, for an hour; then he bowed to the people, stepped across to where Miriam sat and held out his hand to her, to lead her from the room, after the traditional stage manner. She was unacquainted with this usage, and gave him her hand rather awkwardly, and he led her out through the audience into the passage beyond.

THE LADDER

"There," he said, pausing for a moment to look back into the kitchen. "How the *poverini* enjoyed it! And I have but just escaped from such a life as theirs. But for this" (and he patted the fiddle), "but for this and I would have been as they are."

He turned and walked away through the dark passage toward the coffee room. In the dim light, Miriam saw him raise the shabby little fiddle to his lips and kiss it passionately.

She understood (who better?) why he did so. Hadn't she kissed a heavy, brown paper parcel of manuscript, with just such a kiss?

They came into the coffee room and sat down to wait till some refreshment was brought to them—"some of this vile English coffee," as Herman expressed it.

The room was dimly lighted, and at a table at the other end of it the commercial gentleman was consuming his hot supper. His back was turned to them, and he scarcely looked round, when they came into the room. But a few minutes later, his supper having come to an end, the commercial gentleman rose and walked slowly down the room.

Miriam glanced up as he passed, and with a thrill of entire dismay recognized her cousin Timothy Pillar. He stood still beside their table in sheer surprise, gazing first at Miriam, then at Herman, without uttering a single word. Herman leaned back in his chair and played with the spoon that lay in the saucer of his coffee cup. Then, as Timothy still stood gazing at them, he raised his eyes in an inquiring return stare at this rude stranger, and at last remarked:

TO THE STARS

"Well, sir?" as if to discover the reason of his curiosity. The question brought Timothy to his senses.

"Why, Miriam, who would have thought of meeting you here, of all places?" he said. "Who's with you? What friends have you got here?" The girl was altogether too much dismayed to speak for a moment, and Herman, with imperturbable composure, made answer for her.

"I am Miss Sadler's friend here. I am with her. We have missed the London train."

"And who may you be?" Timothy blurted out.

"My name is not altogether unknown. It is Herman, Francis Herman, if this enlightens you," said he.

Timothy drew a step nearer to the table, his eyes fixed on his cousin, who now began to falter out some words of introduction between the two men.

"This is my cousin, Mr. Pillar," she explained; and at these words Herman rose politely and begged Timothy to join them at their coffee.

"I never drink coffee; it's beastly stuff, only fit for foreigners," was Timothy's gentle reply to this overture.

Herman did not take any notice of the remark beyond slightly raising his eyebrows; but Miriam shuddered; she knew from this what she might expect.

"Now, then, sir," said Timothy, "I would like to speak to my cousin alone, if it isn't asking too much of you to give me your chair for a few minutes."

"Most certainly you shall have it. I shall smoke at the door while you speak with Miss Sadler," said Her-

THE LADDER

man. He bowed slightly to Miriam and sauntered off toward the door, looking very much amused.

Timothy sat heavily down on the chair thus vacated, twirled the gold watch chain that decorated his person, and then leaned across the table toward his cousin.

"Now, Miriam, will you kindly explain this to me?" he said. "As your cousin, one of the Pillars, I must have an explanation of what, on the face of it, seems very unsuitable conduct; indeed, I'll say more, it's disreputable."

Miriam had always disliked her cousin Timothy, and his interference just then was intolerable to her.

"There's nothing to explain," she said hotly, "except what Mr. Herman has told you already. I came down here to spend the afternoon with him, and we missed the train; that's all, and if you choose to call that disreputable, I am sorry for you."

"You always were a foolish sort of girl," Timothy went on; "and, of course, you can't be expected to know anything of life; but you might know better than to throw away your good name altogether by acting in this way."

"You are making a great deal out of nothing," Miriam said doggedly. "I have explained to you about missing the train, and surely anyone is liable to do that without losing their good name?"

"Missed the train! That's an odd excuse. I wonder how often that foreign-looking fellow has 'missed a train' before, in similar circumstances! And how many trains will he miss to-morrow? How did you come to know him, I'd like to know?"

Miriam rose from her chair, hot with indignation.

TO THE STARS

"I won't stay here to hear you say things like that, Timothy," she said. "You are not only insulting my friend, but insulting me, and I won't listen to you."

"Stop a minute; wait and speak to me," Timothy called after her; but she did not wait to hear another word from him. She ran upstairs, shut and locked the door of her room, and flung herself down by the open window, leaning her arms on the ledge. Only too well she knew the story that Timothy would carry back to Hindcup, and the sting of the whole affair was that he could scarcely be blamed for thinking what he did about her.

In imagination she already heard the cousins gossiping over her conduct.

"I won't have a rag of a character left among them all," she thought. One by one her links with her own people had been broken; here was another gone. They had distrusted her ideas before, they would distrust her conduct now.

Down below the window Miriam could just distinguish Herman's figure as he paced up and down before the inn door smoking. Sometimes he would whistle a bar or two of one of the tunes he had been playing. He whistled with a wonderfully full, liquid note, like the song of a blackbird; and sometimes he would introduce little grace notes and flourishes into the tune so deftly and exquisitely that it almost made her laugh to hear them.

Then Timothy came out to the door and joined Herman.

"May I have a word with you?" she heard him ask; and Herman's reply also reached her ears:

THE LADDER

“As many as you wish! Shall we walk down the road?”

Further than this she could not hear; but shortly after a heavy step ascended the stair, a door was closed with a bang and opened again a few minutes later as Timothy put his boots out into the passage. Then another bang and all was quiet.

TO THE STARS

CHAPTER XXXV

MIRIAM never heard what had transpired between Herman and her cousin Timothy. When she came down to breakfast the next morning, Herman seemed to be in a very good humor, and Timothy had not yet appeared.

"I wanted to apologize to you for my cousin's rudeness to you last night," she said, as she sat down. Herman shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"Do not annoy yourself," he said. "It is no good. Here is breakfast; better far to eat it and think no more of the ugly cousin."

She took his advice and ate her breakfast as well as she could. But as soon as the meal was over, she insisted on starting for the railway station in case they should again miss the train. This, of course, resulted in a wait of twenty minutes' duration, and Miriam, glancing along the platform, descried a pile of cases, which she knew must belong to Timothy. He must be going to travel by the same train with them. Miriam walked as far away from the boxes as she could, and kept looking apprehensively in their direction while she talked to Herman.

At the last moment Timothy arrived, but he did not even glance up the platform, and she saw him get into a carriage at the other end of the train.

"Now, perhaps you will be cheerful, now that the

THE LADDER

ugly cousin is out of the way," said Herman, as he shut the door of their carriage. But Miriam did not feel cheerful, she could not speak, and at last Herman told her that she was cross, and began to read a newspaper. She sat back into the corner of the carriage and felt very unhappy indeed. As they came near London, Herman put down his newspaper and came and sat beside her.

"You will think of me this afternoon, when I play?" he asked.

"Yes, I will," Miriam answered. She made the promise readily enough, knowing that she would probably think of him several times before that.

"And you? What will you do the rest of the long day?" he asked.

"I shall sit in my little room, looking out over the roofs, and write some of my worthless pages that never please me, and then perhaps tear them up, and go downstairs and have tea and buttered muffins with Cochrane; that will be my interesting day," she said.

"I blush for you!" Herman said. "I hear you speak evil of your trade; this dear trade which indeed is the interest and value of life for you——"

Miriam shook her head.

"It's just a moment of discouragement," she told him; "of not thinking it worth while."

"So I have felt many times," he said quickly. He lifted Miriam's hand, and held it in his as he spoke. "I wonder how often I have said: 'Let this music be drowned in the deep seas, so that I may live and be merry.' But a hundred years hence what will it matter to the world whether I have been happy or sad?"

TO THE STARS

But it may matter if I made some little tune for men to dance to, one song for them to sing."

Miriam turned and looked into his face. For just a moment their eyes met, and the next moment Herman bent down and kissed her.

It seemed to Miriam that years of life separated her in one moment from all her past.

"The thing has happened to me that I have heard other women speak about," she thought. "This man wants me, and me alone; and I am not beautiful, or attractive; so it is my own self that he wants; *just what other people do not like.*"

But, then, Herman was married; and there was the end of it all.

The train ran into the station, and Miriam rose mechanically. Neither of them had spoken a word. Herman jumped out and held out his hand to help her to alight. She took it, and then stood there for a moment, feeling stupefied. She heard people round them utter Herman's name, and saw them point him out; they looked curiously at her, too, and under their gaze she blushed hotly. It seemed to her that everyone on that platform must see that Herman had just kissed her. She put up her hand to her cheek, feeling as if a scarlet patch must mark the place where the kiss had fallen.

In the distance she saw Timothy advancing up the platform.

"Come," said Herman; "why do we stand still? The crowd gets thicker where we stand."

They passed along to the cabstand, and he stood still there for a minute, looking at her.

THE LADDER

"It is good-by just now, then," he said, "and I come to see you when?"

"Oh, never, never! I mean—good-by," cried Miriam; and hurried into the nearest vehicle without even giving him her hand.

Cochrane met her at the door when the cab drew up; she seemed to have been on the lookout for her.

"It was unfortunate your losing the train," she said, with a grave glance at Miriam's still flushed face, and adding, "it'll have cost you something, too?"

There was a moment of silence while Miriam made up her mind. Was she going to tell Cochrane or not? She decided to be silent. Time enough, if the story reached her ears from any other source.

"It was very provoking," she replied, taking no direct notice of the question. "I wanted to get home in time to do some work that Mr. Courteis wanted."

"Maybe a rest from all that writing was good for you; but you don't look very well," said Cochrane.

"Oh, I'm all right. I'll just go upstairs and see if I can get the work done before dinner," said Miriam.

But when she reached her own room she found she could not write.

"He kissed me—kissed me—kissed me!" she repeated over and over to herself incredulously. "How strange it was, and he is married. He had no right to do it; but he has different ideas about right and wrong. I wonder if they can possibly be true? Could it possibly be right? Must I refuse ever to see him again, as the good women in books do? But books are not life; what do women in real life do? It seems wrong, and yet how am I going to shut him out of my life

TO THE STARS

when he interests me so profoundly? He is wonderful, and unlike everyone else—and yet I would not be a fool to care for *him*; he has come up out of the dust just as I have, into a world of his own making.”

Herman's face, his fearful black eyes, the charming smile on his young mouth haunted her memory persistently. She took up her pen and tried to write, but it was not any use to do so; always Herman's face came between. When the bell rang for dinner at two o'clock, she went downstairs without having written a single line.

“I hope you got on with your work?” Cochrane asked.

“No; I couldn't write a word,” she confessed.

“Dear me! the country air hasn't agreed with you.”

“I think I shall try to sleep after dinner, and then perhaps have a walk; it may clear up my ideas,” said Miriam.

Sleep, however, was not to be any more successfully wooed than art; and in the late afternoon she went out. Without saying definitely to herself where she meant to go, or what she meant to do, somehow her steps turned toward Piccadilly, and she found herself wondering if St. James's Hall was very far away. She walked quickly along until she came to it. There the street was blocked with a row of carriages, and a crowd filled the pavement. Miriam stood among them and looked and listened. She saw the carriages being filled and sent quickly off by the policemen, one after another; but still a little knot of people lingered near the door of the Hall. She turned to two shopgirls beside her and asked what everyone was waiting for now.

THE LADDER

"Some one still to come out, I suppose," the girl answered, and turned to speak to her companion. Miriam fell behind the two girls, and watched to see who would come. Then a little brougham came along and drew up by the curb. After a minute or two a man came out and put a violin case into the carriage, and the people who were waiting drew nearer together and looked impatiently toward the door. A policeman asked them to step back, and then Herman came out. He looked ten years older, she thought, since the morning; his face was white and tired-looking, his eyes blacker than ever. He wore a soft felt hat crushed down over his brow, and without looking to one side or the other he walked through the crowd to his carriage, got in, and drew up the window. The carriage immediately drove off, and the crowd of people soon melted away.

"Wouldn't like 'im to kiss me," laughed one of the shopgirls, as they walked on; "fairly gives me the shivers to look at 'im."

Miriam turned away, a little smile lurking at the corners of her mouth.

"Perhaps it's not as disagreeable as she thinks," she said to herself.

All that evening she was very silent. Cochrane tried to get her to talk, by direct questioning.

"Are you going to any of your Sunday tea parties to-morrow?" she asked; "or are you coming to the City Temple with me?"

"Oh, I am going to shut myself up and write all day."

"Well, to my mind the Sabbath should be a day

TO THE STARS

of rest ; but you've a right to your own opinions, of course," said Cochrane.

" I think my work is the one good thing about me ; the one thing that God can possibly look on with satisfaction," said Miriam gravely.

" Well, well ! I wonder often what you'll make of your life," said the older woman, as she gathered up her work and began to tidy up the room for the night. She knew that something was troubling Miriam, but had too much good sense to try to force her confidence.

" It's a pity I wasn't younger," she thought. " She might have told a younger person ; and I've a dry, stiff way with me that doesn't show what I'm feeling. I'm sure I'm sorry for her ; so unlike her people, and that clever she's separated from most of the world by it. I'm sure it's a misfortune to a woman to be born clever, and no mistake."

But Miriam, unaware of all this unexpressed sympathy, kept the trouble and perplexity to herself.

THE LADDER

CHAPTER XXXVI

TIMOTHY PILLAR generally went home to Hindcup from Saturday to Monday each week, so Miriam's relations heard, without much delay, the story he had to tell about her.

Sunday was a grilling day, and Timothy, tired with business, did not rise early or go to church. But in the afternoon, very fine in a white waistcoat, he set out to call upon his sister, Maggie Broadman.

Maggie, as the "best married," most prosperous Pillar, was always supposed to be the one whose advice was most to be regarded; for, with many people, prosperity is considered synonymous with wisdom, though it is hard to say why it should be.

Maggie had sent her husband out for his Sabbath walk with the children, and she was sitting dozing in a plush armchair when Timothy was "shown in" (as she would have herself expressed it) to the drawing-room.

They had not spoken many words to each other before Maggie divined that her brother had something of interest to tell her. His mouth was pursed, his eye bright; he pushed aside as trivial several topics which on another occasion would have interested him.

"The fact is, Maggie, I've something very extraordinary to tell you," he said at last; "extraordinary and very sad; it's Miriam again."

TO THE STARS

Maggie drew her chair nearer to his, in an ecstasy of curiosity.

"Miriam! Whatever has she been up to next, Tim?" she asked.

Timothy leaned back in his chair (which was one of those wretched three-cornered seats, the very acme of discomfort to a man of his size, but he did not seem to notice its angles at that moment), folded his fat hands across his white waistcoat, and pursed up his mouth still more, as if to keep back the flood of news that nearly overwhelmed his speech. And at last, when the auspicious moment seemed to have arrived, he burst forth:

"She appears to have formed an illicit connection with—" He paused, and Maggie, whose curiosity now amounted to agony, cried out:

"Whom? Whom, Timothy?"

"With Herman, the well-known violinist." It was, indeed, no anticlimax.

Maggie flung herself back into the plush armchair.

"Timothy, it's impossible!" she cried; and then, true to her nature, instead of pitying poor Miriam's fall, she exclaimed:

"I didn't think any man would look at her; I don't believe it; men all hate her; you've been mistaken. It can't be."

"There's no mistake. I met them staying alone together at a village inn in Hampshire. I confronted her. I told her her conduct was disreputable, and as a cousin I must have some explanation. But all she did was to offer the old explanation of 'missing the train'; and when I said *that* cock wouldn't fight, she

THE LADDER

said I was insulting her and him, and left the room. I saw them go off to London together next morning—private first-class carriage, no less. I never looked at her after what had passed between us the night before; but I watched them, you may be sure.”

Maggie leaned back in her chair perfectly overcome by this story.

“I never did hear anything like it,” she said. If she had been quite honest, Maggie would have confessed that her respect for Miriam, instead of being lessened, was increased by the fact that any man should care to go about with her.

But few people are quite honest, even with themselves; and Maggie assumed an appearance of entire dismay.

“How do you suppose she ever got speaking with a man like that? And then, to think that he *cared*—with Miriam!” she exclaimed.

“It’s very remarkable,” Timothy admitted. “For my own part, cousin though she is, I never found a word to say to her—and plain-looking too.”

“Who will tell her mother?” Maggie asked. “She must be told. I’ve no doubt she will go up to London and try to do her best for her.”

“I think you should tell her. You could do it very delicately,” said Timothy. “And I will take a walk across to the Manor and tell Aunt Pillar; she may as well hear it soon as late. But you must tell her mother.”

“I’m sure it’s a terrible thing to have to do,” said Maggie, who was in reality casting about in her mind for the most effective words in which to convey the

TO THE STARS

news to Miriam's mother, and quite enjoying the prospect of telling such a dramatic story.

"Tell me, Timothy, how did she look? Had she on very fine clothes? I suppose they always keep them in the greatest luxury."

"Well, I can't say I noticed anything the least different about her dress," Timothy admitted. "But I wouldn't be likely to."

"Dress was never any temptation to Miriam," said her cousin, and then she added: "You know, Tim, if anyone is to go and deal with her it must be Aunt Pillar. Aunt Priscilla never could deal with anyone; she's far too soft."

Timothy quite agreed with this. Aunt Pillar had always been the family oracle to whom everything was referred, and she, if anyone, must make a pilgrimage to London to remonstrate with this erring young relative. It seemed as if Aunt Pillar had in a remote way been the reason of Miriam's going to London; for was it not under her eye that she had first met these Gores who had so completely "turned her head," by lending her unsuitable books, and doubtless introducing her to unsuitable people? Remembering all this, Timothy and Maggie agreed between them that Aunt Pillar must be the chosen instrument of expressing the family indignation.

"I almost think you should take a fly this afternoon, Timothy," Maggie said; and again the brother and sister agreed. It seemed to add solemnity to this pilgrimage that Timothy should arrive at the Manor gates in a fly.

Timothy was a great favorite with Aunt Pillar, and

THE LADDER

she contrived that all the wineglasses used in the Joyce establishment were bought from that firm of glass and china merchants which he represented. Timothy, in his turn, contrived that the wineglasses were got at "a low figure, considering the crests; as low," he would say, "as we can possibly do." Ah, what an Eden this world would be if all families could thus play into each other's hands!

Aunt Pillar, then, received her nephew warmly. She would have sent at once for Mr. Hoskins, the butler, but Timothy stopped her with a wave of the hand.

"Not at once, aunt," he said. "I'll have some private talk with you first."

"Nothing wrong with any of my little investments, I hope?" asked Aunt Pillar, whose affairs were under Timothy's eye.

"Nothing at all. I'd better go straight to the point and tell you it's Miriam Sadler once again."

"I'm not surprised," said Aunt Pillar. But she was fain to admit, when Timothy had told his story, that she was very much surprised, indeed.

"It's nothing short of a disaster to our family," she said. "If I hadn't been for thirty years at the Manor it might even have cost me my situation here. A family like the Joyce family like to have all their subordinates above reproach. There was that head housemaid we had for five years, her sister, the kitchenmaid, had a child to the head groom; and after that nothing would please her ladyship but the whole boiling must go—Emma, as had been such a comfort to me these five years, just as surely as poor silly Hannah, and

TO THE STARS

Evans the groom. You've no idea how particular they are."

Timothy listened with some impatience to this long case in point, as Aunt Pillar supposed it to be; then he returned to the original theme.

"Now, aunt, I've talked the subject over with Maggie, and we both feel that you are the person to go up to London and look after Miriam. Aunt Priscilla is too weak to do it, and Miriam would pay no attention to any of us. As I told you, she paid none to me."

"I haven't asked for a holiday for many a year. I wonder could I be spared? The very thick of the jelly season, and a new cook, too," Aunt Pillar said, hesitating.

"Well, surely our reputation as a family is more worth preserving than fruit is," said Timothy, with an unusual essay at wit.

"You scarcely understand the business preserving is in a house like ours," Aunt Pillar protested. And then compressing her lips, she added: "And maybe it's too late to save her, and the best we can do is to say nothing and just let her *disappear*."

Aunt Pillar threw an awful emphasis and significance into this last word. It seemed to describe poor Miriam's descent into the fearful pit and the miry clay.

"Well, that is what we must find out, and whether this was a casual connection, or if she is living openly with him," said Timothy briskly. "You know Miss Cochrane, aunt; you can find out the truth easily from her; she must know if Miriam has left her house."

THE LADDER

"That's true. A telegram will do that."

"And if she hasn't left the house, the sooner she's brought home and looked after, the better. If she has, if she's gone off with him, there's very little can be done."

"She won't come home, not since Priscilla married."

"Make her come," said Timothy.

But Aunt Pillar shook her head.

"Miriam's a grown woman, Timothy, and not any one of us can take her home against her will. Of course her mother might refuse to give her money to live on, but that only might make the matter worse. I'll go and do my best; and if that fails, *I'll get the Gores to help me.*"

To any hearing ear or understanding heart, it had been almost pitiful—the tone in which Aunt Pillar mentioned the Gores. The aristocracy were her divinities; so might a more faithful heart have called in its extremity to the Almighty.

With commendable prudence, the aunt and nephew decided that what must be a slightly incriminating telegram to Cochrane should not pass through the Hind-cup office. Timothy would dispatch the message from Birmingham the next day.

It was only after this decision had been arrived at that Hoskins was summoned for a long conversation on wineglasses. He accompanied Timothy to the door after half an hour of this exhilarating topic, saying as they parted:

"We could do with another dozen of the crested champagnes, Pillar, at thirty-two shillings; and if

TO THE STARS

you can do them at thirty shillings, so much the better."

"I'll do my best, you may be sure," said Timothy, and no one guessed that any other errand had brought him that hot afternoon to the Manor.

THE LADDER

CHAPTER XXXVII

MIRIAM was sitting reading on Monday morning when Cochrane came in with a telegram in her hand.

"Whatever does this mean?" she asked. "Here's a telegram from your aunt, Mrs. Pillar, asking if you are still with me. It's been sent from Birmingham, too, not from Hindcup, and I'm to wire reply. Had you any word of leaving me, my dear, that they should ask?"

Miriam read the telegram and shook her head.

"I never once thought of leaving you," she assured Cochrane; but she blushed hotly as she spoke, for the real meaning of the telegram was quite plain to her.

"What am I to say, then?" Cochrane asked.

"Oh, just say, 'Never thought of leaving'; that will put it right. There must be some mistake, surely," the girl replied.

But in spite of this reassuring message, she was scarcely surprised the next afternoon to be told that her Aunt Pillar was in the parlor, and wished to see her.

"I hope there's no family affliction of any kind," Cochrane added. "She looks real solemn."

"I hope not," said Miriam, laying aside her work. She knew pretty well what she would have to face now.

Aunt Pillar was sitting on the sofa, her fat feet well

TO THE STARS

stretched out before her. She wore a black silk gown, and, in spite of the heat, a black velvet cloak heavily trimmed with beads. In her hand she carried a little maroon leather reticule. She had just opened this and taken out her handkerchief to wipe off the beads of perspiration from her forehead.

"Why, Aunt Pillar, I never expected to see you here. What has brought you to London?" Miriam said, rushing upon disaster in this her first sentence.

"You should know," Aunt Pillar replied grimly. There was going to be no beating about the bush between her and her niece.

"I suppose Timothy has made up some story about me, and that you believe it, and probably my cousins believe it; and perhaps even my mother does so?"

"I've never had any reason to doubt Timothy's word yet," said Aunt Pillar.

"What did he say?"

"He said as he had met you staying alone at an inn with a foreigner, Miriam Sadler; and I defy you to deny it."

"I don't deny it, Aunt Pillar; because it is true. I did go down to the country with a friend, and lost my train, and had to stay all night at the inn; but I don't see why all my people should think evil of me because of that."

"I do," said Aunt Pillar. "Respectable young women don't lose their trains, or their characters in that way."

"The truth is that you and all my family have always disliked me, and wanted to make me out in the wrong ever since I was a child," said Miriam bitterly.

THE LADDER

The pained sound in her voice made Aunt Pillar think for a moment that she had perhaps spoken too harshly to her niece.

"Come," she said, "you're speaking nonsense. We're not a family that like to run each other down, as you know; we're all anxious to keep up the credit of the connection. There's perhaps been a little feeling between you and your cousins that was natural enough on your side; they all marrying so well, and being so much thought of, and you a bit in the shade; but that's no reason for you to be so bitter."

Miriam smiled, but said nothing, and Aunt Pillar went on:

"Now, just to show you the truth of what I say, I've come to make you an offer. We talked it over yesterday, your mother and your cousins and me, and here it is: you're to come home——"

"But," Miriam began. Aunt Pillar waved her down and continued:

"We knew what you would say, that you couldn't and wouldn't come back to your mother's house now she's married Smaile. So we considered, and Mattie has offered to take you in. She's expecting again in autumn, is Mattie, and so you would have some occupation looking after number one while Mattie looked after number two. There's always plenty to do where there's two young children; sewing needd, and what not. It would keep you employed and out of mischief; and Mattie said to tell you with her love that bygones would be bygones."

Miriam essayed speech once more, and once more was silenced by Aunt Pillar's torrent of words.

TO THE STARS

"Now, don't say you won't, Miriam; for a young woman in the position you find yourself in now, it's a wonderful offer. Here you get the offer to be received back again into a respectable connection as if nothing had happened, and many a family would never have owned you again."

"Nothing has 'happened,' as you express it, Aunt Pillar," said Miriam. "My life is exactly what it has always been, and Mattie need not trouble to offer me an asylum."

"You mean to refuse her offer, then?"

"Certainly."

"Then you mean to stay in London and have more of these on-goings with this Frenchman, or whatever he is?"

"I mean to stay in London."

"And what about the Frenchman?" Aunt Pillar urged.

"He has never said a word to me that might not have been said before the whole world," she said.

"Don't sit there and tell me there's nothing between you and him, for I won't believe it, and it would be better for you to tell me honestly from the beginning."

Miriam rose, and stood leaning one hand on the table and looked straight at Aunt Pillar.

"I'll tell you what there is between us," she said. "It is what there will never be between me and any of my own people—*understanding*. Perhaps it's a dangerous feeling; but I'm glad to have felt it, whatever trouble it brings to me."

"There, I knew it!" Aunt Pillar exclaimed. For, as she said when describing the scene to Maggie

THE LADDER

Broadman, "Things have gone pretty far when it comes to that silly talk about *understanding*. Who wants to be 'understood,' unless it's a fool like Miriam?"

Aunt Pillar's deep distrust of her niece's charms led her to ask further:

"He hasn't made you a direct offer, I suppose, from what you say? That talk about understanding generally means nothing."

"Mr. Herman is married already," Miriam answered. "So you have given yourself a great deal of trouble about nothing."

She felt as if she had come off victorious in this conflict when she saw her aunt's nonplused expression. Yet, deep down in her heart, she felt that she had deceived Aunt Pillar by that statement, and her instinctively honest nature was troubled by this feeling.

"*The truth is not always true,*" she told herself.

Aunt Pillar, however, was a woman of strong common sense; she sat silent only for a moment before she said:

"If he's a married man, as you say, Miriam, it's only so much the worse for you to be carrying on with him this way. Where's his wife these days when you go traipsing off to the country with her husband?"

It was a perfectly pertinent question, and Miriam knew that it was; but nothing is more provoking than having thus to confess the truth. She turned hotly upon her aunt.

"I have heard all I am going to hear about this," she said. "Either you speak about something else, or I leave the room."

TO THE STARS

Aunt Pillar was not accustomed to have her nieces take the high tone with her; she rose up in wrath.

"Miriam," she said, "you were always an intolerable, set-up piece; set-up because of what you considered your cleverness. But, believe me, it'll be the ruin of you, setting up your own wisdom against the experience of older people. I'll not stay here to be spoken to like this. I meant to stop for a cup of tea with Cochrane; but not in your company after this!"

"I'm sorry you won't stay and have tea, Aunt Pillar, and I'm sure Cochrane will be sorry too."

"I'm sure of it; we would have had a good deal to talk over, her having been so long with the Gores, who are so intimate with the Joyce family, and altogether I had several things to tell her. But I won't stay. Good-by, and I won't have much of comfort to tell your mother."

Miriam opened the door and let her relative pass out through it. She did not attempt to part with her on more friendly terms. In the passage she heard Cochrane encounter her:

"What, Mrs. Pillar! Surely you are not away without a cup of tea?"

"Thank you, Cochrane; another day I'd be more than pleased; but I must be off now my business with Miriam is over."

"I'm really sorry, Mrs. Pillar; where are you to be to-night?"

"At Jenkins's Temperance Hotel. *You* remember Jenkins, I daresay. You knew he had set up for himself in the Temperance line? I told him myself I thought it a mistake and him such a good judge of

THE LADDER

wine. Well, it's there I'm to be to-night; it's near Victoria."

"You'll get a 'bus easy, Mrs. Pillar."

"Well, I daresay; but I'm not too sure of them 'buses; which will be the best?"

"I'll put on my bonnet and just see you into the right one; quite a pleasure to me to do so."

Aunt Pillar subsided on to one of the hall chairs, and a few minutes later Miriam watched the worthy couple go off together down the street.

TO THE STARS

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THEIR figures had scarcely disappeared round the corner when Miriam, standing aimlessly at the window, saw a carriage draw up before the door. It was a little, tight-looking brougham. She had seen it before.

Herman got out, looked up at the window, and catching sight of her, smiled and ran up the steps to the door.

Miriam stood paralyzed for a moment.

Would she send him away? There was still time to do so. She ran to the door, her heart beating very fast, stood still again, turned and walked back to the window; in that minute of irresolution the battle was lost and Herman came in.

"I have found where you live," he began, and then with a sudden rush of words he went on:

"Miriam, I have come; I want you—I need you; I cannot live without you."

She had given him both her hands. He stood there holding them and looking down at her, waiting for her to speak. A dozen random thoughts chased each other through her brain as she stood there in silence and Herman held her hands in his. Aunt Pillar's flushed, angry face (it would be angrier and more flushed could she look in on her now); her cousin Timothy;

THE LADDER

Alan Gore; one after the other she seemed to see them, and then, because, in spite of her unorthodoxy, she was profoundly religious at heart, came the thought of God; would His face, too, be turned against her now?

"You do not speak," Herman said at last. His voice broke in upon her thoughts and compelled her to speak.

"I can't," she said. "I do not know what to say."

"I find in you something my heart has sought for all my life and never found till now; is not this enough? Does much still lack?" Herman asked.

"Yes. You told me that you were married," said Miriam.

Herman let her hands fall from his, and sat down on the sofa so lately tenanted by Aunt Pillar.

"Come," he said, "we will talk of it all." Miriam sat down beside him, and turned her large troubled eyes upon him.

"If I could see it right myself, I would not mind what other people thought about it," she told him. "But just now it seems wrong to me even to let you talk this way to me. Do you think this foolish of me?"

"But yes; it seems to me the merest superstition! This woman has, indeed, my name, and by bad luck much of my money; but for any other claim on me—no—I married her in my foolish boyhood, or, rather, she married me. She has no more hold on my heart than has this cushion." He brought down his hand on one of Cochrane's stiff wool-work cushions with a sharp slap, as he spoke.

"Did you not live with her?" Miriam asked. Her-

TO THE STARS

man seemed to search back into the recesses of his memory before he answered.

"I have nearly forgotten; yes, for a time, but what of that?"

"It seems to me to make a difference."

"Not to me," Herman said. "This living with her only proved to me how separate we were in heart. I have said adieu to her six—seven years ago, and hope never to see her again. This is not to be married; this is to have a yoke on one's neck only, a thing to throw off."

It was not the first time that Miriam had heard these doctrines. She had, as you know, stated the whole arguments for and against a more flexible marriage law in the pages of *The Advance Guard*; but it was a very different matter to be confronted with the question in her own life.

"But do you mean that you—that you want to be divorced from her?" she hesitated.

Herman tossed back the hair that fell across his eyes with a gesture of wild impatience.

"Here, indeed, is the very mischief," he said. "Hasn't she vowed to me she will never divorce me; never make it possible for me to take another wife? She is jealous as a tiger."

"How ugly!" Miriam cried, shrinking back into the corner of the sofa. Herman leaned forward and lifted the flaccid little hand that lay on the cushion beside him.

"Miriam," he said, "do not feel this way. I wish to be done with this ugly world where I have lived until now; where men and women fight for each other,

THE LADDER

and hate one another. I wish to be done with it all, and to have life serene and beautiful with you—if you will come to me.”

“But if I could not be your wife,” she said slowly, “I would not be considered respectable.”

Herman laughed aloud at these words and the grave way in which they were spoken.

“Dear child,” he said, “it is the woman herself who is respectable or not. I have seen so many a married woman to whom I would grudge this good word ‘respectable.’ I know, too, women whose connections are not regular but whose hearts are still like snow.”

“You have seen much more of the world than I have,” Miriam admitted. Her knowledge of those persons who had transgressed the social laws in the community of Hindcup had been limited to two instances: the kitchenmaid at the Manor, whose seduction had so annoyed Aunt Pillar, and another young woman whose name had been solemnly effaced from the communicants’ roll of the chapel, for the same offense.

“Would I,” she asked herself, “if I went to live with Herman, would I be like them?”

The thought made her hot and cold all over.

“I can’t listen to what you are saying,” she said hurriedly. “We would not be happy; people who do these things are miserable——”

“But, Miriam, listen to me; what you say is perhaps true of those *liaisons*—these miserable sordid affairs. But you I want so differently. I want you for always, till death parts us; till the soul of me has perished I shall want you!”

TO THE STARS

He caught Miriam in his arms and covered her with kisses. The urgency of his passion swept away her scruples as a rising flood carries before it all the straws and sticks that have gathered in the side eddies of a stream. She was loved fondly and dearly, loved and understood at last, after the long repression and blighting influences of her girlhood. The man who loved her thus was no enigma to her, as the young men of Hindcup had been; she had to make no effort to understand the workings of his mind, or to explain to him what she felt about anything. Between them there was a perfection of sympathy that scarcely needed words. Neither of them was ordinary; and in this their extraordinary attraction for each other consisted. Just in proportion as Miriam had found it impossible to get on with the average youth of Hindcup, she now found it easy to get on with Herman. Just as she had nothing to say to them, she had everything to say to him.

"Say that you will come to me," Herman urged; for while she realized all this Miriam had been silent.

"I can't," she said at last. "Not yet; my mind is not enough made up yet."

"You do not care enough," said he.

"I must have time to think. You cannot expect me to make a decision like this all at once."

Did she care enough? That was the question in her mind; care enough to throw away reputation and the esteem, such as it was, of her own people, and become an outcast from them forever. "I must wait and find out," she thought.

THE LADDER

"And how long will this decision take you?" Herman asked.

"I do not know; I cannot say. You must know how difficult it is for me—" Her eyes were full of tears as she looked at him, and she went on: "It is so difficult to distinguish. I am more than happy when I am with you. I love to listen to every word you say; I wish to tell you everything in my heart; but is this love? I do not know. I must wait and be sure."

"And if you were sure?"

There was a long silence before she answered.

"If I were quite sure, if I knew that I had found this wonderful thing, I do not think that I would hesitate." Herman flung himself back against the wool-work cushion with something between a laugh and a sigh.

"See you are quick about it, little one," he said. "It is of my nature to be greatly impatient. I shall write to you each week to know how the decision prospers."

"You must not be unreasonable," said Miriam gently. "For you know if it is your nature to be 'greatly impatient,' it is mine to think a long time about everything. I have to see both sides of every question. Just now, I am inclined only to see one side of this—how happy I might be with you; but I know there is another, and I must look at it also."

"That you might be miserable with me? You speak, no doubt, of this hot temper of mine, which is notorious?"

"No, I never heard about it. I only guessed that it

TO THE STARS

was there when I spoke to you by the river," she said, with a smile.

"I was indeed cross. I have frightened you."

"I never thought of it again. It has nothing to do with my hesitation. I scarcely think I should care, however cross you were to me," she said.

"What then? You have heard that I am extravagant, that I do not hoard my money?" She shook her head and smiled again.

"I have never heard any stories about you; all my scruples come from my own mind. You must give me time."

"You will at least write to me. I do not stay after this week in London."

"No," she answered slowly. "I do not think that I will write to you. I wish to live my life entirely without you, as it was only a few short weeks ago. How short our knowledge of each other is, after all, and it seems so long!"

Herman got up and walked to and fro across the little room.

"Now you speak like a fool," he said. "So well you might turn back the hands of that clock to twelve and say you wished to think it noon again! You cannot get me out of your life now. I am in it forever."

Miriam was silent; she knew that what he said was true.

"Go, please, I want to be alone," she said. But when he had gone the room felt cold and dark. She shivered and glanced at the empty grate, not realizing for a moment what it was that she missed.

A terrible temptation assailed her: here she was,

THE LADDER

at war with her own people, misjudged and misunderstood by them, and now Herman offered her love, understanding, companionship—those wonderful gifts. But then— “Oh, how bitter it is!” she cried. “Where I could have given love I did not dare to entertain the least thought of it—and now when love is offered to me, must I reject it?” Miriam fully realized at that moment the dilemma she had arrived at, and confessed it openly to her own heart at last. She could never feel to Herman as she felt to Alan Gore—but yet how he understood her, how he charmed her! Surely for companionship such as his she would be wise to forfeit everything, even her good name itself. And then he loved her—and no one had ever loved her before. In time perhaps she would forget the old, foolish wound and be happy and contented with the love of this wonderful man who was so unlike everyone else. . . . Thus the Tempter whispered in her ear.

TO THE STARS

CHAPTER XXXIX

COCHRANE walked back from Victoria very slowly. She had a good deal to think about, for Aunt Pillar had found it necessary to pour out all Miriam's story to her old acquaintance on the way to the 'bus. Cochrane had received the tale, as she received most things, in silence. She scarcely knew what to think of it. "But one thing's certain," she said to herself, "and that is, the girl needs a friend."

She had detected the hostile ring in Aunt Pillar's voice, and the fact that she seemed anxious to put the worst instead of the best construction upon the story.

"The Pillars always had a coarse streak somewhere in them," she thought. "There's a way and a way of telling a thing. I remember in the days when Jenkins was courting me, Mrs. Pillar had a way of noticing everything that went against me. Well, well, Miriam is a queer girl to come from that stock."

Cochrane had resolved to adhere to her former resolution and ask no confidence from Miriam. But when she reached home the little maidservant Gavina met her at the door in a state of huge excitement.

"May I speak a minnit, ma'am? There was a gentleman with orful eyes up in the parlor with Miss Sadler. Came in a carriage and kep' it at the door, a *real* carriage, ma'am."

"Well, Gavina, what of it?" said Cochrane in a repressive voice. "Is the gentleman still upstairs?"

THE LADDER

"No, ma'am; gone, ma'am. I watched at the 'ead of the backstairs all the time to make sure."

"I well believe it, Gavina; get away downstairs now to your work," said Cochrane severely. She would not encourage gossip about her boarder. But this announcement of Gavina's had brought her to a decision. She must speak about this visitor. Going slowly upstairs, Cochrane entered the parlor and shut the door. Miriam was sitting by the window; she had no pretense of employment. Cochrane came and stood behind her chair, and laid a kind though heavy hand on her shoulder.

"My dear," she said, "your Aunt Pillar has been telling me you're in some trouble with them at home, about some man; and now Gavina tells me he has been here while I was out." She came and sat down beside her, then, and waited that she should reply; but, instead of speaking, Miriam suddenly laid her head down on Cochrane's hard, uninviting-looking shoulder, and wept bitterly.

"Dear, dear!" said Cochrane, commenting, meanwhile, on the smell of tobacco that clung to Miriam's face, "and very good tobacco; not servants' hall stuff, in the least," she said to herself.

"There, now, tell me about it, my dear," she said, when her sobs had quieted a little. "I'm afraid you and your aunt had a few words; she seemed put about and warm a little."

It did not take long, however, for Cochrane to discover that these tears were not flowing for Aunt Pillar's displeasure.

"Now, Miriam," she said, "it's happily a case where

TO THE STARS

there's no two ways. What you have to do is never to see him again, or hear from him, or of him, or look his way. If he writes to you, put the letter in the fire; and if he comes to see you, leave word you won't see him. As sure as death, my dear, if you do anything else, you'll get into trouble."

"But——"

"There now, never say the word. There's no two ways about it."

"I shall never see another man like him," said Miriam.

"I daresay not."

"Do you not think that makes a difference? He is not like other men, he can't be judged by their standards."

"I think right's right, and wrong's wrong; and no good can ever come of mixing them."

"And what about the color and interest of life?" Miriam said, speaking out her thoughts aloud, forgetting who her listener was.

For answer, the good woman stepped to the book-case and took a Bible down from the shelf. She licked her thumb, and slowly turned page after page in search of some passage. Then she brought the book over to where Miriam sat, and laid it on her knee, pointing to a verse.

"Read that," she said, and she slowly repeated the stern and terrible words aloud:

"And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire."

THE LADDER

"That's it, Miriam. I've seen women go into hell in this world, with both eyes, because they were afraid to pluck out the one. See that you don't do the same."

She closed the Bible and went quietly out of the room, and Miriam sat looking out into the glaring street, and repeated the terrible words over and over to herself shuddering.

TO THE STARS

CHAPTER XL

It was characteristic of both of these women that after this day they never mentioned Herman's name again to each other. Miriam applied herself more than ever to her work, and only saw Cochrane at meal times. The breathless summer days passed one by one; the air began to feel used up, and as if there was no vitality left in it. The grass in the parks became brown and juiceless; the trees were powdered over with dust, and all the fashionable world, which makes the bravery and show of London streets, went out of town, leaving only a shabby million or two of poor people behind in the torrid wilderness of stone and lime.

In this parched-up, weary town, Miriam lived on and worked, learning some of the unteachable secrets of her trade. From writing descriptions of individuals, she advanced to creating types, an immense step in artistic achievement. She learned also to forget Courteis and his maxims, and to trust to her own intuition. She began to let her characters take their own way, and followed their leading blindly. At her heart she felt a stirring which told her that these children of her imagination lived; but could Cochrane be expected to understand the interest, the misgiving, or the rapture, that by turns possessed her about them? and there was not another soul in London just then with whom Miriam could hold converse. So she

THE LADDER

worked on without encouragement; probably the best way in which to work. She had few letters in these days. Correspondence with Hindcup consisted in a biweekly letter from her mother which contained very little of any interest. The cousins never wrote, and Miss Foxe was a poor correspondent. So it would have been ridiculous of Cochrane to seem unconscious of a startling-looking envelope which lay on the breakfast table one September morning, addressed to Miriam. It bore the name of a hotel, a Vienna hotel, printed largely across it, and the very handwriting of the address was curious. It was sealed, too, with white sealing wax, and stamped with a strange seal.

As it was impossible to ignore the letter, Cochrane sensibly decided to speak about it.

"That's a letter you should burn, my dear," she said, as she passed it across the table. Miriam held out her hand for the letter, blushing hotly.

"There isn't any fire," she said, glancing at the grate, which was empty.

"Oh, there's always the range downstairs. Gavina's making the beds just now; you could step down easy and burn it in a minute."

"Oh," Miriam cried, "I want to read it so much!" She had laid the letter on the table, and now she covered it with her hand, as if to protect it from harm. To her imagination the envelope felt warm and sentient; it would have been cruel to burn it.

"Take my advice and put it in the range," said Cochrane. She had begun a pretense of making tea, but was really too deeply interested in the fate of the letter to attend to what she was doing, so she set

TO THE STARS

down the teapot again and waited to see what would happen.

Miriam rose, holding the letter in her hand and stood irresolute for a minute, then she turned and ran out of the room. Down the dark little backstair she ran, across the kitchen, and without giving herself time to hesitate again, thrust the letter between the bars of the stove. It caught fire at one corner and fell down from the bars on to the hearth. Miriam caught it up and, flaming as it was, pushed it back into the fire.

"There, there! it's done!" she cried out aloud, rubbing her fingers, which were all scorched at the tips.

Gavina's hurrying step came down the stair, and Miriam turned away from the fire.

"I've burned my fingers, Gavina," she said. "I was burning a letter."

"Lor', miss, that's bad. 'Ave some soap to it. Whatever made you do that?"

"I was in a hurry," said Miriam. But she did not seem in such a hurry to reclimb the kitchen stair. She came up it very slowly, as if every step were an effort, and sat down listlessly at the breakfast table; for it was sure to be such an eventless meal now!

"There's a Hindcup letter there too," said Cochrane. "But better have your breakfast first; the bacon is getting cold."

"Yes, Hindcup letters are seldom exciting," said Miriam, sipping her tea in an absent sort of way. What had been in Herman's letter? she wondered. Certainly nothing tiresome or ordinary—of that she was sure enough. More probably much that was in-

THE LADDER

teresting and unusual. Had it been a love letter, such as other women spoke of getting? such as she had never received in her life? Surely she might have allowed herself to keep it; perhaps in old age she would regret having destroyed this evidence that she, too, had once been loved and desired like other women. Then breaking in upon these thoughts, she opened her other letter. It was from her cousin Emmie; an unusual occurrence.

Emmie had no great art as a letter writer, and her announcement that it was Miriam's clear duty to come home at once was made without much circumlocution.

"Your mother has been ailing for a long time, but none of us thought there was anything seriously the matter, and as you had had such words with Mr. Smaile your mother hesitated to ask you to come home, and went on hoping she would soon be better. Now Sydney has been called in, and he finds that she has a mortal complaint, and says you must come home at once to look after her. If you return and try to do your duty, Miriam, we will all try to forget the past. We always were a family that thought a great deal of duty." Thus the artless epistle ran.

It was the first intimation Miriam had had of any failure in her mother's health. She was startled by the news, and more startled to feel how sadly little her mother's death would mean to her. They had never been anything to each other, and the remarriage with Mr. Smaile had alienated them more and more. "How dreadful that I should feel so little! I must do everything that I possibly can to make up for my want of love," she thought. For she knew that the duty

TO THE STARS

exacted by want of affection is far more inexorable than the joyful service of love; no jot or tittle may be omitted by it, till the whole be fulfilled. Back to Hindcup she must go, cost her what it might, and do her duty to the uttermost.

"It's a sudden call," Cochrane pronounced. "Better start to-day. You'll never regret doing the best you can." She noticed the girl's dry eyes, and drew her own conclusions.

So a few hours saw Miriam off again to Hindcup, her life in London over for the present. Just eight months since she had left home, and all the world different to her already. A new thought in her heart, a thought that would not be put by; she had seemed till now to be helplessly in the grasp of circumstance; now circumstance seemed to be in her own hands. She might go to Herman and change her whole life forever, if she chose.

Emmie met Miriam at the station. Her manner was a curious blend of curiosity and condolence. Mrs. Smaile's illness was the only subject she mentioned; but an ungovernable curiosity shone from her every glance.

"Yes, indeed, Miriam; I knew it would be a great shock to you; but Sydney says it will be a long case. You'll feel it very much, and I daresay you were reluctant to leave London too; but I felt I was only doing my duty as the doctor's wife when I wrote you all the truth."

"Yes, thank you, Emmie, I am very glad you told me at once. Mother had given me no idea she was ill."

THE LADDER

"Well, you and Smaile had such a dispute, I suppose she felt it would be difficult having you at home again."

"It will be difficult," Miriam agreed.

"You're not looking at all well. I'm sure you are writing too much. As Sydney said to me the other day: 'I wish,' he said, 'that she would be done with all that writing and get married.'"

"I know you all think that," said Miriam, smiling to hear the well-worn sentence trotted out once more. Somehow it had lost its sting now, "Though, after all," she thought to herself with a rueful smile, "I'm less likely than I ever was to get *married*."

"I'm afraid you will have a very trying time with poor Aunt Priscilla," Emmie went on. "She is very fractious. Sydney says it's the nature of these complaints, so you must try to bear with her. And then old Smaile is always hanging about. We don't think him very satisfactory."

"That is no surprise to me. I'm glad if you all have found it out at last."

"Well, at any rate it was your duty to come, and I'm glad you've done it. Here we are at the door. Sydney will be up to-morrow morning. Good night, Miriam."

Yes, here she was, walking up to the well-known door, as if she had never been away from Hindcup. The door stood open, and Miriam walked in and entered the parlor where she knew her mother would be sitting.

Mrs. Smaile sat by the fire doing nothing. She did not look very ill. Miriam stooped down and kissed

TO THE STARS

her, as a sign that peace was restored, for they had parted in anger.

"I'm glad to see you don't look so ill as I expected, mother," she said, after the preliminary explanations and exclamations had been gone through. Mrs. Smaile gave a petulant sigh.

"It's very hard everyone telling me I am not looking ill, and me suffering as I do," she said. She began then to pour into her daughter's ear all the symptoms of her illness—how she felt this, and how she felt that; how Mrs. Hobbes had a friend that died of the same not long ago, and had felt just the same; how Aunt Pillar had heard of yet another sufferer whose symptoms were identical.

Miriam listened to it all, realizing mutely what lay before her. To this pitiful, wandering, disgusting chronicle she must listen uncomplainingly till the end came. She wondered, as she had occasion to wonder a hundred times in days to come, at that want of the acceptance of the inevitable which characterized her poor mother. Mrs. Smaile was always wondering why she must suffer thus; wouldn't it be possible to do anything more for her than had been done? just as in former days she used to wonder why she had been given a queer daughter like Miriam, instead of an ordinary, marrying young woman, and whether nothing could be done to alter the disposition of this unlikely daughter of hers?

When at last Miriam went up to her own room to unpack, she felt the dear lamp of hope burn very low in her heart. She took out the pile of manuscript which represented the work of the last six months,

THE LADDER

and looked at it fondly. But as she looked, she despaired. How would it be possible for her, here and now, to finish it? She put it away in a drawer, and came downstairs again.

Mr. Smaile had come in, and thought to propitiate his stepdaughter by offering her a fatherly salute. She shrank away from him as if he had been a toad; but he drew her to him, and planted a hairy kiss on her brow.

"Welcome home, my dear," he said, and the cordial words had an insincere sound to her. Miriam was disgusted by his kiss. She remembered with a sudden sense of contrast the feeling of Herman's smooth brown cheek against her own, and the remembrance sent a wave of color across her white face.

Mrs. Smaile had been ordered a milk diet; but she "fancied something fried"; so there ensued the first of endless scenes where Miriam had to coax her mother to eat the prescribed food, and hear a dozen reasons why she could not or would not do so. At last, when her own meal was quite cold, she was allowed to begin to eat it. But before she had eaten many mouthfuls her mother wished to be taken upstairs to bed. Thus began Miriam's initiation. She had entered on one of those slow martyrdoms that women are called to, compared with which the brief terrors of the stake and fagot sometimes seem an easy path to glory.

TO THE STARS

CHAPTER XLI

FOR the first few months of her illness, Mrs. Smaile was not entirely confined to her bed ; but she suffered, poor woman, from an incurable restlessness which made her undecided as to whether she wished to lie down or get up. These vacillations were always referred to her daughter for settlement, but the advice she gave was seldom accepted ; for if Miriam decided that her mother should stay in bed, she at once wished to get up ; or if the decision was in favor of getting up, she at once wished to stay in bed. Aunt Pillar came frequently to see her sister, and to offer advice to her niece.

"You should be firmer with her," she would say, planting her fat foot on the carpet, as if to illustrate how her poor sister's invalid fancies should be crushed down. And Miriam at such times used to envy that callous nature, which was the almost priceless possession of Aunt Pillar. It would have been no difficulty to her to refuse to comply with any number of sick fancies. Indeed, she would rather have enjoyed the process of denial.

"There's no good giving in to whimsies, just because a person's on their deathbed," was one of her aphorisms. "It may be a long time yet ; she's wasting very slowly." Miriam shuddered at such remarks ;

THE LADDER

but Aunt Pillar would have been much surprised to hear that her words had been considered callous.

"Poor mother, I can do sadly little for her after all," Miriam would say, in defense of her own system. She saw very little of her cousins in these days. Emmie, in her capacity of the doctor's wife, came over when she heard from her husband that Mrs. Smaile was particularly ill. She was more good-natured than her sisters, and was really sorry for her cousin just now, so she would sometimes offer to sit with the invalid for an hour while she went out. But on her return Miriam always found Emmie very impatient to get away, and she would whisper to her:

"Really, I don't know how you stand it, dear; an hour is all I am fit for. Sydney doesn't like me to be overtired; he takes such care of me. It's so nice to be taken care of. Well, good night, and take care of yourself, as you haven't a husband to look after you."

Miriam generally found her mother considerably the worse for Emmie's well-meant intentions, so, after a few such experiments, she got into the way of refusing her cousin's aid.

Never had time seemed so endless. The dismal days, punctuated by nothing but the fluctuations of illness, might have had twenty-four hours instead of twelve; the dreadful nights, when pain seemed more unbearable in the darkness; the melancholy dawns that were the saddest time of any. For with returning consciousness there came to the sufferer a terror of all the pain she must endure, and she would mutter, "Another day," with an intonation that Miriam could scarcely bear to listen to; so about the time

TO THE STARS

that her mother generally wakened, she used to slip out of the room that she might not hear that terrible whisper.

As Christmas drew near there were many consultations among the cousins as to how they were to observe the festival. In deference to Mrs. Smaile's illness, the usual junketings were put off; but Maggie Broadman gave a "very quiet" dinner to her relations on Christmas Day, giving the invitations in a voice which seemed to indicate that the meal was to be eaten in silence. Miriam, of course, never thought of going to it; her duties at home were far too arduous to let her think of such a thing. Mrs. Smaile was now always in bed, and suffered intensely. Miriam watched beside her in an anguish of pity, the old tremendous puzzle that has at one time or another assailed most of us plucking at her heart.

"How can God permit it? I wouldn't let a dog suffer like this if I could help it. Is God less tender than man? How terrible! How cruel!"

In these long days she did "a deal of thinking," as the country people say.

"I, too, shall some day be lying on my deathbed. What shall I most regret then? What will seem worth while?" And her heart always gave the same answer: "To have missed love would be the bitterest thought. The only thing that can seem worth while then will be love."

As she came to this conclusion, she looked at her mother and wondered. She had never heard her mention her first husband, Miriam's father, with anything that could be termed more than tepid affection. It is

THE LADDER

certain that Mr. Smaile had inspired no deeper feeling, while for herself Miriam knew that her mother had always felt more anxiety than love. Alas, what a shipwreck of life! There are natures of this kind (they are less infrequent than is popularly supposed) who are incapable of deep feeling toward anyone. The great experiences of life pass over them, leaving them practically the same as they were in extreme youth. Such a person had poor Mrs. Smaile been. She had married twice, probably only because she had been asked twice to marry. She had borne a child and reared it, yet to the last her heart was empty, and her affections undeveloped.

Mr. Hobbes came often to pray by the sick bed, and used generally to try to improve the occasion to Miriam.

"How little any earthly thing can do for your mother now," he used to say, and Miriam kept silence, for her heart said:

"How terrible to leave the world without having made more of it. When I come to die, I should like to have felt all that my heart could feel of earthly happiness." Thus by a strange inversion she thought exactly the opposite of what Mr. Hobbes wished her to think. Instead of thinking how fleeting and worthless the things of earth were, she thought, "How valuable they are! How terribly worth while! The future world is all a vast uncertainty; therefore, what one should grasp at are the best things of this world. Perhaps, after all, the soul only lives once. . . ."

Little did Mr. Hobbes know of all this as he sat by poor Mrs. Smaile's side one dark afternoon, and

TO THE STARS

repeated to her the beautiful old hymn which tells of the passage of the river of death.

Miriam sat beside them, her head bowed, and listened to the words—those she had quoted to Herman:

“Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood
Stand decked in living green.”

She forgot that sad death chamber where she sat, and seemed to be back again in the smiling summer meadows with Herman. The young life in her heart bounded up toward happiness, as a lark leaps from the cold earth to meet the sun. “Surely,” she told herself, “surely death and pain and misery are not what we are made for. Surely God will not blame us if we seek the brightness?” When brought into the near presence of death, youth will always feel this revulsion from it, this craving for life and happiness. And this from no hardness of heart, or want of feeling; but from a deeply planted instinct as urgent as the growth of a plant toward the light.

Can you blame Miriam, then, when you hear that she did not leave Herman’s next letter unopened? It arrived on one of those dark days, dark with a double gloom. Outside, the winter sky was black and lowering, and inside the house there was that awful oppression which broods over a household in which some one is drawing near to death.

It was a dramatic moment for the arrival of a love-letter, and as Miriam broke the seal (unheeding Cochrane’s urgent note inclosing the letter, and advising, “Burn this one, too, my dear”) she seemed to feel a breath of hope and life and joy. Herman wrote:

THE LADDER

It is now four months, Miriam, since I sent to you a still unanswered letter. I have waited with a newly acquired patience, which has now broken down, and I write again. Why do you not answer me? Have you ceased to think of me? or do you still look round and round this subject as you said you must?

I have been to Russia, where I played before the Czar, and have received from him a gold cigarette case of great grandeur. I have been also to Rome, and from the King of Italy have a diamond scarf-pin which may some day be yours, if you will. I have been to Lisbon, too, and to Paris, where I now am. I do not come to London till Easter. There I play for three weeks, and then—shall I have worked hard enough? Shall I have earned my rest? If by that time this book of yours is finished, if, too, these scruples are overcome, we shall go abroad. I do not care where, so you are with me. For this is love; with you I could be happy no matter where or how, rich or poor, or famous or unknown. Write to me soon to tell these scruples have faded away.

HERMAN.

Miriam read the letter and went upstairs to her mother's room, carrying it still in her hand; but as she entered she slipped the letter into her pocket, for Aunt Pillar was in the sick room. She had insisted on coming to spend the night, much against the wishes of her niece.

"I know you'll be helpless when the death really occurs, Miriam," she remarked. "Not that you have not done very well by your mother through her illness—I'll say that for you; but a death is different. I've seen a good many in my day. I know sister would have liked me to see to everything. I daresay you've never thought now of having a handsome nightdress ready? No, I thought not; well, I sent

TO THE STARS

to Goodhampton yesterday so as to have everything ready; so you won't need to trouble."

"I'm sure it was very kind of you," Miriam said. She sat down by the bedside to resume her watching, and her thoughts. Aunt Pillar stood looking calmly at her sister.

"Dear me! poor Priscilla, how she has gone away, to be sure!" she said, laying her hand on the unconscious brow for a moment, and then adding in a whisper: "She's as good as gone; just breathing and no more."

"Yes," Miriam said. She scarcely dared to look at her poor mother's face; the anguish of weariness written there made her tremble. But the sight moved Aunt Pillar only to a faint compassion; she was sorry to see her sister dying, to be sure; but she did not see in this deathbed scene a reflection of countless deaths as painful. Blessed are the unimaginative, for undoubtedly they shall inherit the earth! After a brief survey, then, Aunt Pillar decided what it was best to do.

"It was such a bustle getting away from the Manor this afternoon. What between one thing and another, I'm fairly tired out," she announced. "So I'll just go and lie down on your bed, Miriam, just as I am, taking off my boots; they're elastic-sided and I can draw them on in a minute if you call me."

"Yes, thank you, Aunt Pillar," said Miriam, and with a sigh of relief she heard the door close behind her relative; for it had seemed unbearable to her that that untender eye should rest upon the last moments of her mother's life.

THE LADDER

Sitting with her head bowed, only looking up now and then to assure herself that the breath still came and went from her mother's lips, Miriam watched the long night through.

In the shadow of Death, Life kept whispering in her ear: "*This is the end of all things; to this we shall all come; eat, drink, and be merry before the evil days come.*" She took Herman's letter out and held it in her hand; it seemed to bring a breath of comfort into the solemn darkness that surrounded and terrified her.

With the dawn the end came. Aunt Pillar had never stirred, and Miriam felt she must summon her now. She stepped across the passage into her own room.

"Aunt Pillar," she said, standing beside her, and then a little louder: "Aunt Pillar! Mother is gone."

The good lady started up, flushed with sleep, and a little confused.

"Why! you don't say so! and I sleeping so sound. Give me my elastic-sided boots, my dear, and I'll be with you immediately. Dear, dear!" Miriam turned away and wept—not, alas! for the mother she had lost; but for that old "woe o' the world" of which this death had been a typical instance. On every side, turn where she might, some misery was going on: pain, terrible and unrelenting; mental anguish, crueler still; and death, awful and omnipotent, the end of all flesh.

TO THE STARS

CHAPTER XLII

AFTER her mother's death Miriam went to stay with her cousin Emmie for a few weeks. Emmie was the only one of the cousins she could get on with at all; and, though they had little in common, her easy good-nature counted for a good deal.

Emmie made a duty of feeding Miriam on strong soups and urging her to rest in the afternoons, and all the time she was watching her closely and drawing her own conclusions.

"There's more wrong with her than 'run down-ness,' Sydney," she told her husband. "She has something on her mind; I know how it was with me just before we got engaged. I wasn't entirely sure if you meant to propose, and I worried myself quite thin. I'm sure you remember? I do; one night at the Badminton Club you said: 'Why, Miss Emmie, your shadow *does* grow less nowadays!' and I thought it such a poetical way of expressing that I was losing flesh; I suppose it was your own?"

"Well, no, Emmie; I think some one else said it; probably Shakespeare."

"Well, never mind; it's quite as clever to know Shakespeare as to say things out of one's own head; anyway, that was what happened to me, I got thin, and Miriam is getting thin, too, and it's about that man, I'm sure."

THE LADDER

"Remember the girl has just nursed her mother through a long and painful illness," said Dr. Pratt, who, not being a Pillar, was able to see some other reason than a love affair for the girl's worn-out appearance.

"No, no! men are stupid; yes, even you, Sydney, dear. I know it's that she is in love; you may say what you like," Emmie persisted.

She tried in a good-natured, clumsy way to gain her cousin's confidence, but all in vain. Miriam never allowed Herman's name to cross her lips.

By her mother's will, Miriam, rather to her own surprise, found herself independent; that is to say, she had a small yearly income which would be quite sufficient for all her wants, and a little margin over.

"Of course you will just settle down sensibly in Hindcup beside us all," Emmie said. But Miriam had no idea of doing anything of the kind. As soon as her affairs were settled she intended to return to London, and then? Ah, that was the question of questions which was never long absent from her mind. She had not answered Herman's letter; she did not mean to do so. "I shall wait and speak to him," she thought.

Easter was early that year, and after Easter Herman was to be in England. Miriam decided to go back to her old quarters at Cochrane's about that time. In the meanwhile she was more of a puzzle than ever to her cousins. They acknowledged that she was gentler, easier to live with than of yore, but more secretive, even less possible to understand than she used to be.

"Well, you're your own mistress now, and none of

TO THE STARS

us can say a word to you," Aunt Pillar said, when Miriam told her she was going to London; but her tone expressed grave disapproval of the decision. Had she known all that was passing in her niece's mind, she would have looked graver still.

"Would it be doing wrong?" Miriam asked herself a dozen times a day. "It seems to me that to throw away youth and love for so-called 'principle,' is like the old fable of the dog with the bone and the reflection. Let me keep hold of what I'm sure of. If I give Herman up, my life will moulder on for valueless years, and then I shall die. If I go to him, I *may* be miserable, I may repent it, but I shall have had my moments of joy. Surely, even God would forgive me. He remembereth that we are but dust!"

Herman's easy creed recurred to her—more attractive, more workable for poor human nature, it seemed to her, than the old inexorable doctrine of right and wrong! So, pondering these things in her heart, Miriam returned to London; and as she drove from the station she saw big-lettered bills on the hoardings:

HERMAN

ON THE 14TH INST.

AT 3 O'CLOCK.

It seemed to her that she could not escape his name.

Each day the date of his coming to London drew nearer. Miriam marked the passing of each day, till at last she said to herself, "He is here to-night," and the thought made her tremble. She knew that he could always find out her address from Max Courteis,

THE LADDER

and she expected that it would not be long till she heard from him. Cochrane was out when the eventful letter came, and Miriam could open it unobserved.

"When can I see you?" Herman wrote. "Say where you are, and which hour to come, and I shall come." She sat holding the letter in her hand and gazing at it, lost in thought. What was she going to do? She could not ask him to come and see her here, when Cochrane felt as she did about him. Equally she shrank from going to see him by herself, and yet she thought:

"Why should I shrink from doing this, when perhaps I am going to consent to live with him? I need not be so particular about proprieties."

Having come to this conclusion, she wrote, telling him that she would come to see him the next afternoon. Miriam thought she had realized what this meant; but when she found herself at the door of the hotel, her courage suddenly failed. How extraordinary it seemed that she should come there alone to call upon Herman! The hall porter and the man in the lift looked curiously at her, she thought, as she uttered his name.

"I'll just see if Mr. Herman is in," the man said, preceding her along the passage. Miriam knew without being told that he was, for she heard the sound of his violin in the distance. The playing broke off as the man tapped at the door, and she heard Herman answer impatiently:

"At home? Not to the King himself just now. No, no, no, no, no! I will have none of them to-day!"

TO THE STARS

"It's a lady, sir," the man insisted.

"Not Miriam?" Herman exclaimed. He pushed past the man, and ignoring his presence, came forward, holding out his hands to her.

"He says 'a visitor'; how am I to know? Come, Miriam, come in," he said, leading her into the room and closing the door.

"This is how it is with me to-day," he went on, sitting down sideways on a chair, and giving an impatient backward toss to the hair which fell across his eyes. "This is how it is, Miriam. I wake at dawn with the divinest of tunes in my brain (you have no doubt experienced these dream inspirations?)—'Aha, Herman, at last you have heard this tune you have waited for so long!' I thought. And then I essay to play the tune, and where is it? Gone, vanished, singing somewhere ahead of me; so far ahead that I only catch an echo now and then. All this day I have labored to catch it, and now it is farther off than ever. Tell me, have you, too, felt this?" He passed his hand across his eyes with a weary gesture.

Miriam smiled.

"I have awakened with the most divine verses in my head, and when I tried to write them down, they were gone. I know how it feels—so cruelly disappointing." It was characteristic of both of them that they should sit down to talk in this way, when they had met really to make the most passionate decision of their lives. Neither of them felt any incongruity in it; it seemed the most natural thing to do. Miriam spoke again.

"I fancy," she said, speaking very gently, "that

THE LADDER

you have labored too much." Herman lifted his violin and played a few notes on it.

"It went something like this," he said fretfully. "So far I go, and no farther. But, *mon Dieu!* how tired I am!" He laid down the violin again and turned to her much as a weary child might have done.

"Can't you rest me? Can't you help me?" he asked. All the woman in her stirred in answer to his appeal. She took his hand in hers and stroked it gently. "Often," she told him, "when one leaves off thinking and puzzling over a thing it comes right of itself, because one's mind has been given a rest. It's like trying to catch a timid creature—the best way is to pretend you are never thinking of catching it."

"We'll pretend, then," said Herman. He took his violin and laid it carefully away in its case. When this was done, the cloud had passed away from his face, and he looked another man.

"She always gives good advice," he said, laughing.

"Perhaps to other people."

"I see, I see; my battle is won!" Herman cried delightedly. "You have come to tell me that all is well? And see how you will help me, will comfort me! Half an hour ago I was beside myself. You come in and put all to right. There are those, Miriam, who are meant for each other, if the very stars fight against them."

Miriam rose and held out both her hands to him, and standing there she looked straight into his eyes—black, and lit up as if a fire burned behind them.

"O Herman!" she cried, calling him quite unconsciously by the name the world called him by, "if I

TO THE STARS

were to do this for you, would you indeed be true to me forever and ever?"

Her voice quivered, and she turned her face away.

"Of what use are vows, Miriam, made just to be broken? Vows will make no man true. It is from the heart fidelity comes, not from the lips. Do not ask me for vows! I cannot give them. This is the best I can give you." He bent down and kissed her trembling lips as he spoke. Miriam was silent, and he went on:

"Where shall we live, my heart? I shall give you a villa in Italy, or a castle on the Rhine, why, or a *château en Espagne*, if that is your pleasure! You shall choose."

Miriam shook her head.

"I should not want any of these fine things. A very small house, where I could live very quietly with you, would be all I wanted," she said.

Herman laughed his gentle, sweet-sounding laugh.

"Very *bourgeois*, indeed, Miriam," he said, "would be this little house with, I suppose, two old maidservants, and a little carriage with fat horses and a fat coachman? and I to come in and eat with you roast mutton and this atrocious milk pudding which your English doctors delight to order me? This will be a *bourgeois* paradise, indeed!"

"Oh, how can you laugh?" she cried. It seemed to her that Herman thought of all her hesitation as merely a joke. He did not, for once, seem to be able to understand what she felt. She sat in miserable silence for a minute, and then suddenly hid her face against his shoulder and wept.

THE LADDER

"I seem to be throwing away my whole life," she sobbed. "I might have been so happy with you, but I can't do it, I can't."

"This respectability, the god of the Englishwoman!" Herman exclaimed. "This is what hinders you, for this you will throw away our happiness!" He put his arm round Miriam, half-angry with her, wholly tender, and kissed her tear-stained face. And as she leaned her head upon his breast and felt the sweetness of his kisses, it seemed impossible to Miriam that she could renounce his love. Was she not a fool for her pains? Was not happiness, at whatever cost it might be purchased, indeed the "inalienable right of humanity"?

But as she felt all this, she also felt suddenly and unmistakably that nothing could make her do this thing. She might argue round and round the point in her own mind; but she could never get past the fact of right and wrong. It had seemed as if she might; now she found it was impossible. That immense force which lurks in every one of us, alternately making or marring, saving or damning us—the force of inherited tendencies—rose up in Miriam and clutched her from the tide of circumstance like a strong hand catching hold of a spent swimmer. She had thought herself different, in every imagination of her heart, from her own people—those dull, respectable, law-abiding, unimaginative natives of Hindcup; but she was not. The past is too strong for us, and holds us in a firmer grasp than we know. At every crisis in life this determining factor is beside us, urging us in one direction or another, so that we are never really

TO THE STARS

left to make our decisions quite unaided, or, as the case may be, unhindered. In Miriam's case the balance that had trembled so long, fell to the side of morality, weighted by this force she did not even name to herself.

"I cannot do it," she said. "I must say good-by; my mind is quite, quite made up at last."

But when she went out again, it was into such an empty world.

"Alan Gore is going to be married; and I have said good-by to Herman forever; and nothing interesting or remarkable remains for me in the whole world," she told herself.

THE LADDER

CHAPTER XLIII

ONE day, not very long after this, Miriam went down to the city to see Max Courteis at his office. He was always glad to see her, and always received her with the same question:

"Well, your book done yet?" and got the invariable reply that it was not. This afternoon he seemed even more interested than usual in Miriam. He looked at her, quite closely for him, for a moment.

"I have come to see you on business, Mr. Courteis," she said. "I want your help. I want you to give me some work—anything. I don't very much mind what it is, but something that has got to be done every day without fail."

"Why do you want that?" he asked.

"Because I don't seem able to do my own kind of work just now, and I want the other."

There was a short silence.

"A great waste of your abilities to do drudgery," said Courteis, taking up a paper knife and beginning to slash open the leaves of a magazine while he spoke.

"They are not being used in any better way," said Miriam. "I can't work just now."

Courteis slashed away at the magazine, then suddenly held it out toward her.

"Very like him; very good, isn't it?"

She looked down at the page. There was a por-

TO THE STARS

trait of Herman on it, so lifelike that she started as she saw it.

"Oh, don't!" she cried, as if something hurt her. She covered her eyes with her hand. Courteis smiled and laid the magazine aside.

"You've quarreled with him, I see—and hear; I saw him yesterday."

"Yes?" said Miriam almost inaudibly.

"He's ill, you know. He has given up all his engagements and is going to Paris whenever he is able for the journey. You knew this?"

"No."

Courteis leaned back in his chair, fixing his eyes on the opposite wall with a dreamy stare.

"It's a tremendous responsibility to upset a temperament like his," he said. "Have you weighed the subject properly?"

"I suppose I know what you mean," said Miriam. "Do you think it's a subject I would be likely to dismiss without much thought?"

"He doesn't bear to be thwarted," Courteis went on, without heeding her question. "And, after all, why should he be?" He paused and looked at her again curiously.

"God thwarts us," said Miriam, shortly and bitterly. She felt just then ungrateful for the conscience that seemed to have ruined her life. Courteis was silent again for a minute or two.

"Well, Miss Sadler," he said at last, "you know my views of life by this time. I've a tremendous respect for genius; it's the lever of the world. Let it have its way, I say. If I were a woman, I would be

THE LADDER

honored to sacrifice my good name for Herman. But you don't see it that way, and you've got genius yourself, so you must take your own bent, too, and trust yourself. Perhaps you're right."

"Genius has nothing to do with this question; it's a clear case of right and wrong," said Miriam.

"Yours, that is to say, is the moral temperament; Herman's is not; that's all," said Courteis. "It's a sad pity they crossed. If your genius is going to be hindered by him, you were right to be done with him. *He* said his would have been helpful to you; but that's another question. Well, why do you want this work you speak of?"

"Because I am miserable," she said bluntly. She hated to sit there in broad daylight, discussing the deepest feelings of her heart with this man, as she might have discussed the symptoms of illness with a physician. Yet Courteis seemed to have been so instrumental in shaping her life, that she could not refuse him her confidence now; but for him she would never have met Herman.

"You think work like this will help you?" Courteis pursued.

"It might," she answered.

"Perhaps it will," Courteis admitted. "It may—but I'll tell you one thing; try as you will, you'll never be able to forget Herman, if that's what you want to do." He rose and walked across to his desk, searched among his papers, and lifted a pile of letters.

"Look at that," he said. "Look at that for a correspondence! It grows and grows, yet few paid persons would be clever enough to help me with it; *help*

TO THE STARS

me, mind—without always referring to me to do the thinking. I'll let you try if you can. If you make any fatal blunders, you'll have to give up the job. Perhaps you may prove better at this sort of thing than I am myself. Do you think you know good stuff when you see it? If you do, I'll have to pay you well, I suppose; but you won't expect anything till I see what you are worth? When will you begin?"

"To-morrow, if you like, Mr. Courteis."

"Very well, to-morrow at ten o'clock." Miriam rose and held out her hand to say good-by, and hesitated for a moment, as if she wished to say something.

"Well?" Courteis said. "Anything else?"

"Yes; one other thing. Mr. Courteis, might I ask you never to speak to me about Francis Herman again? It—it hurts me," she said. She turned away quickly as she spoke, and did not wait for his answer.

The next morning Miriam began her work. She very soon saw that there was a great deal of interest to be got out of it. For when she found something really good among the "unsolicited contributions," her joy was immense; while a sorrowful interest attached to even the most piteous attempts at composition. It was her snare at first to look at every manuscript in too personal a light. She seemed to see the contributor before the contribution, and was harrowed by the thought of the disappointment that was in store for so many of these would-be authors. She longed to find something good to say for the worst of them. But from this overkindliness her taste and judgment held her back. She could not commend bad, any more

THE LADDER

than she could ignore good, work. Courteis began to find that he had an ally in Miriam, one on whose judgment he could depend. The book-taster, like the collector of pictures, is born, not made.

"Where d'you get it?" he would say, rubbing his hands together delightedly. "Where d'you get it? When I remember you two—or three is it?—years ago at that *fête* at Hindcup, what a raw young thing you were, to be sure! Didn't know Shakespeare from Smollett—and here you are, as good a judge of style as I am myself; and that's saying a good deal. It's the old story, *it can't be taught*; no, nor caught, nor bought, either. It's in the blood; a germ that grows and fulfills itself like any other."

Miriam would laugh and shake her head.

"You forget that I have been working hard all these years, Mr. Courteis. Reading enough (according to your theories) to make me dull for the rest of life, and learning by the faults in my own writing to notice the faults of other people—and their virtues too."

Miriam's connection with *The Advance Guard* inevitably made her more intimate with both Max Courteis and his wife. She went every Thursday evening to their house and helped them to receive the motley assemblage of guests that appeared there weekly. Miriam confessed to a weakness for aspirants, though she told Courteis she had never discovered one as aspiring as she used to be herself. The greater lights of literature she stood in awe of; but it was a joy to her to be in the same room with them. Mrs. Courteis in her flabby way grew fond of the girl, and wel-

TO THE STARS

came to her to the house. She generally found some domestic difficulty to lay before her.

"The lamps won't burn to-night, Miriam; what can be the matter with them? And Mr. Courteis was quite cross last week because the tea and coffee were mixed somehow in the pouring out. Will you try to keep them from getting mixed to-night?"

Miriam, who had been considered so unpractical and undomestic by her cousins, generally found a remedy for these minor evils. One autumn evening when she arrived, the house seemed dingier than usual. All the lamps were burning badly, and smelling of paraffin, a state of matters which Mrs. Courteis exclaimed at, but was powerless to remedy.

"Ah, here you are, Miriam; do show Bertha about these lamps! I expect quite a number of people to-night," the good lady said, drifting about the room, sniffing the paraffin-laden air, and catching the lace of her floppy gown on the backs of the chairs as she moved about. Miriam removed the lamps one by one to be refilled, opened the windows, and sat down to await the coming of the guests. Max Courteis came sauntering in. "Your friend, Alan Gore, is coming this evening, Miss Sadler," he said. "I met him in town and asked him to come. Have you seen him lately?"

"No, not for more than a year," she said. "His sister is abroad, and I never see him when she is not here."

"Ah, well, you'll see him to-night. It seemed to me there was something wrong with him; he looked changed a little since I last saw him."

THE LADDER

"He is going to be married," Miriam said, quite without cynical intention. But Courteis laughed, of course, at the threadbare joke against matrimony.

A little later in the evening Gore arrived. He came up to where Miriam stood, and even before she had spoken to him, she noticed the change that Courteis had alluded to. He looked very much older and graver.

"Why, Miss Sadler, I have not seen you for a long time; and I hear you have become Mr. Courteis's right hand, and are a very important person, indeed!" he said, as they shook hands. He was noticing the change wrought in Miriam by the last year, just as she was noticing his changed appearance; and he was wondering, like her, what had caused the change.

Now that she had more money at her command, Miriam dressed quite differently, which was partly the reason why she looked different. But her whole expression had altered, intensified, fined down. And her manner had gained a pleasant composure that it used to want.

"I have not reached the stars yet," she said, smiling. "And I think I begin to believe you now, that they are never reached."

As she stood there beside him, Miriam felt, as she had always done, from the first day they met years before in Aunt Pillar's parlor, a childish desire to lay all her life before him, to tell him everything in her heart.

"Oh, I have been through such trouble, such perplexity since I saw you last," she said, yielding to the childish impulse for a moment.

TO THE STARS

"Yes, I heard; I heard that your mother died. Was it your affairs, your money matters that were the perplexity?" he asked.

"No; oh, no; money had nothing to do with it. But I can't tell you what it was, not here, in this crowded room, with people talking all round. Tell me about Delia, Mr. Gore—what she is doing, and where she is."

Their talk drifted off on to less personal topics, but all the time Miriam kept wondering what was the matter with Alan Gore. She found out quite by accident what it was.

"I have scarcely seen Delia since that ball at the Manor a year and a half ago," Miriam said. "I saw her just for a few minutes then, and you and Miss Hastings—" She stopped suddenly. Instinctively she felt that she should not have mentioned Sophia Hastings. There was an awkward little silence for a moment.

"Did you know that I was not going to be married?" Gore said. He looked down at the ground as he spoke. Miriam drew a long breath of surprise.

"Is that what is the matter?" she asked.

"Yes; I thought you would have heard. Shall we talk about something else?" said Gore quickly. And Miriam began in a great hurry to tell him about her work.

THE LADDER

CHAPTER XLIV

MIRIAM'S book had never been finished yet; all this daily work for Courteis had taken up both her time and her thoughts; but quite suddenly one day the impulse to finish the book came over her. She jumped up and pulled out from its resting place the long discarded manuscript, ran to the table and found a pencil, looked for a knife to mend the point with, and failing to find one, sat down and began to write rapidly with a very bad point indeed.

Where the impulse came from, she could not have said, but there it was. She found it difficult to write the sentences quickly enough; it was as if some one stood beside her dictating into her ear. Everything was easy, the right words came unsought, and the ideas jostled each other in her brain.

"That's right; that is what I have wanted to express for so long; how did I not do it before?" she thought as she wrote on. Cochrane came and told her that it was time she started for her work in the city, but Miriam never looked up.

"I'm not going," she said curtly. She could not bear to stop; the work must just be allowed to take care of itself, and Miriam admitted that Courteis would be the last person to blame her for this decision.

Dinner had been on the table for half an hour before

TO THE STARS

she came down, very untidy but very cheerful, to eat the neglected meal.

"Why, Miriam, whatever have you been doing? Your hair is very untidy-like," said Cochrane, who kept a stern eye on the personal appearance of her boarder.

"Oh, I know. Yes, I am late."

Cochrane pushed in a few protruding hairpins, and remarked that she was glad to see her look so cheerful again.

"My book has moved on," said Miriam in explanation. She sat down and gulped the tepid soup, quite unconscious of its tepidity.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Cochrane. "Well, I'm glad to hear it; after you're done with dinner, maybe you can wash the streaks of lead pencil off your face; they're no improvement."

Miriam did not pay much attention to such details, however, for many days to come. She was terribly afraid that the happy mood would fail her; she must make the most of the golden days when they were with her.

"It's just going too well," she sometimes thought. She wrote to Courteis unceremoniously, asking for a holiday.

"You had better grant it me, for I shall take it if you don't," she added. The letter pleased Courteis more than she knew.

But when at last the book was done, rewritten, corrected and sent off, there came a terrible pause in her life; it felt like the day after some one has died in a house.

THE LADDER

"I don't know what to do with myself," she said. She did not feel any wish to work, yet she wearied without employment.

"If you take my advice," said Cochrane, "you'll take a change down to Hindcup and see your relations." She stopped by the window, as she spoke, to adjust the blind and to look out.

"There's a gentleman at the door in a hansom," she said. "It must be some one to see you."

"What is he like?" Miriam asked, from her chair by the fire; she felt a very languid interest in him.

"Gray hair, stoops a bit from the shoulder, and worried-like," Cochrane reported.

"Oh, that's Mr. Courteis himself; I expect he has come to speak to me about my book," said Miriam, her interest aflame again.

"I'll be off to the kitchen then," quoth Cochrane. "Gavina is never the worse of a looking after, and I won't interrupt your conversation."

Miriam at once conjectured that there must be something wrong with the book, and steeled herself to bear a stringent criticism.

"Well, Mr. Courteis, is it deplorably bad?" she asked him as he came in.

"Which?—the book? I haven't come about that," Courteis said. He looked very grave.

"Won't you sit down?" she said, wondering what his business could possibly be.

Courteis sat down, felt in his pocket, and took out a telegram, rubbed his hand across his eyes, and said nothing.

TO THE STARS

"Is anything the matter?" Miriam asked. "Has anything happened?"

Courteis still hesitated. He began to speak and could not.

"I've had a telegram—several telegrams. The fact is it's poor Herman," he blurted out at last.

"What? Please tell me right out what it is!" she said.

"He is ill, very ill; very unlikely to recover; he wishes you to come and see him."

"Oh," said Miriam. Her face whitened, but it hardened, too, and in a minute she added: "His wife is the person to go to him if he is so ill."

"His wife!" Courteis exclaimed. "Good Lord! it's his wife who has done it; she shot him on the steps of the Opera House in Paris yesterday."

Miriam sat back in her chair and covered her face with her hands. She could not speak, she could not think; the whole world had suddenly become black to her. Courteis, too, sat silent for a minute or two, then he touched her arm.

"He wants you. Won't you go and see him? I'll take you across to Paris if you will come."

She uncovered her eyes and stared at him blankly.

"But he—Herman—isn't dying," she said in a whisper.

Courteis shook his head.

"I gather that he is. Lord! what a waste of good things!"

"Could that vivid spirit ever die?" she asked slowly. He glanced at her in surprise.

"That's as people believe," he said. "But this

THE LADDER

doesn't seem to be the time for speculations on immortality; the body is mortal only too surely. Are you coming to Paris with me?"

"Yes," said Miriam, rising from her chair as she spoke. "I'll go and get ready at once; I'll go with you whenever you like."

Courteis only waited to arrange the details of the journey with her; then she went to find Cochrane and tell her of this intended departure. She listened quietly, her hand on the girl's shoulder.

"There now," she said; "it's the end of a long temptation—if it is the end."

They arrived in Paris that night and drove straight to the hotel where Herman lay. Courteis went to get the last report of his condition and came with it to Miriam.

"He is likely to live for a day, or perhaps two; and he wishes to see you to-night. You must take some food first and then go up to see him," he told her.

Miriam did not want the food; but she took it without protest, and then went with Courteis along the corridors to Herman's rooms. His servant opened the door to them and led them into a sitting room.

"I'll wait here if you go and see him," Courteis whispered.

She followed the servant into the other room. It was dark, except for a little shaded lamp which stood beside the bed on which Herman lay.

"This is the lady who has come from England, sir," the man said; and both he and the nurse, who rose from her seat by the bedside, looked curiously at Miriam.

"She has come? Bring her here, Charles," said

TO THE STARS

Herman. His voice was little changed; every intonation of it was familiar to her. She drew nearer to the circle of dim light and stood beside him.

"I am here, Herman," she said. The servant man and the nurse went out together into the room where Courteis sat, and they were left alone.

As she stood there, Miriam noticed all the ridiculous luxury of Herman's surroundings—the lace-trimmed pillows he lay upon, the silk shirt he wore, the embroidered sheets that covered the bed; she was far from Hindcup that night, she thought, with a sudden flicker of a smile across her grave lips. But the smile died away as she looked again. Herman lay there straight and rigid as if he were carved out of stone; he did not stir at the sound of her voice, only turned his great black eyes to gaze up at her.

"Sit down, Miriam," he said. "There, beside me, and put your hand in mine, for I cannot move."

She did as he directed, and waited that he should speak again.

"So this is the end of me," he said. "I lie here to realize it; by to-morrow perhaps I am not here; all the skill gone from this hand you hold; *gone where?* My God, Miriam, I am not dull, I have much to speculate upon!"

"Are you afraid?" she asked, in an awed voice. Herman smiled.

"No, no; why should I fear? I have none, only a great curiosity fills me, and a vast regret."

"Regret?" she questioned.

"To leave the brave world so soon, the wonderful world."

THE LADDER

His eyes closed, and he lay still; but Miriam felt a strange thrill pass down the hand she held in hers; as if, she thought, the hand tried to speak.

Herman opened his eyes again after a little.

"Have you finished your book?" he asked.

"Yes; just finished it; but what does that matter?" she answered.

"I am glad to know; I hindered it long. I wish you a hundred felicities."

"O Herman!" she cried, with a sudden uncontrollable burst of tears. "Felicity isn't for me; what do I care for that wretched book? I want to see you live; that is all I care about."

Again she felt that strange tremor pass down through the lifeless hand she held; but he did not speak. She was beside herself with grief, with pity for his weakness, with an anguish of regret and bitterness.

Millions of men and women, as soulless as the clods of the valley, would live and multiply to make the world duller than it was; and Herman, with his supreme gifts, his exquisite faculties, lay there perishing before her eyes. In the cities where he had played, perhaps some echo of his music might linger in the hearts of men, but of the man himself, his vividness and charm, the delight of his presence, what trace would remain for the time to come?

"O Herman, don't die, don't leave the world!" she cried, bending down over him, and then burying her face in the pillow she sobbed aloud, unable to control her grief.

"My poor girl!" he said gently.

TO THE STARS

With a great effort Miriam steadied herself.

"I'll go away for a little, till I feel quieter," she said; "then I will come back again."

She went into the room where Courteis sat; the nurse stood there talking to him; she turned at once to ask if anything was wanted in the sick room.

"I think you had better go there for a little, till I feel calmer," Miriam explained. She sat down on the sofa, and leaned her head back against the cushions. Courteis came and sat beside her; he looked sharply at her.

"Did you hear that his wife had killed herself also?" he asked.

She sat forward, gazing at him, trembling with agitation.

"Is it really true?" she asked.

"Yes, quite true. Poor fellow, rid of her too late, I fear." Miriam did not answer; she sat with her head bowed, and said nothing. At last Courteis broke the silence:

"Make him live," he said. "Go and ask him to stay for you; it's my belief that the soul commands the body more than it appears to do. Tell him anything you like, so you only make him stay!"

Miriam looked at him in surprise.

"What do you want me to tell him?" she asked.

"That his wife is gone, that you will marry him," Courteis said bluntly. "I've known good news snatch people from the very gates of death."

"Mr. Courteis, you have been very kind to me," Miriam said, "but I can't let you talk to me like this. Do you think it's decent to speak of the death of a

THE LADDER

man's wife as 'good news'?—a dreadful death like that, too, however little he cared for her?"

"In some circumstances, I do."

"Well, I do not," said she.

Courteis rose and stood before her.

"I've a right to my opinions, and a right to practice them too. I'll take the risk on myself, and tell him, if you won't. I know more of his temperament than a dozen doctors and nurses."

There was about Courteis a sort of callousness, a disbelief in those primary moralities by which the world is kept going, that revealed itself sometimes in a startling way. Just now he did not seem to be shocked by the tragic end of Herman's wife; he regarded it only as a possible benefit to Herman, as a good riddance of useless lumber.

"I ask you again, will you, or will you not, tell him this?" he asked impatiently, tapping the polished floor with his foot as he spoke.

"No, I will tell him nothing about it," she answered.

Courteis turned and walked across to the door which led into Herman's room. Without even knocking at the door, he opened it and passed in. He stood still for just a moment, then stepped up to the bed and leaned down, bringing his lips close to the ear of the dying man.

"Herman, if you live, Miriam will marry you; your wife is dead," he whispered.

Then without waiting to see the effect of his words, or heeding the nurse's hand uplifted in horrified protest, he turned away and came back to where Miriam sat in the next room.

TO THE STARS

"There," he said, "my soul is free of responsibility. If he dies, he has at least had the best chance I know of to make him live."

Miriam did not look up, but she said:

"I think it is most likely that you have killed him."

"Do you mean to sit up all night?" Courteis said, looking at his watch.

"Yes."

Courteis turned the shade of the lamp to screen her face from the light, asked if there was anything else he could do for her, and then selected a novel from a pile that lay on the table, and went away to his own room. Left to herself, Miriam looked about her. The room was all littered with Herman's possessions—heaps of music untidily piled together, his violin case, the cigarette case she remembered seeing in his hand as he smoked at the inn door long ago; letters, some of them still unopened, newspapers, telegrams, novels—all the accumulations of a busy and untidy existence.

As she sat there in the dim light, she began to wonder if it were all a dream. Was she indeed Miriam Sadler? Her old life seemed so distant and unreal. Somewhere far away in England, there was a little town called Hindcup-in-the-Fields, where a family of the name of Pillar lived, and where years ago, in another life it seemed, a girl named Miriam Sadler had also dwelt. Could it be that Hindcup still stood there among the meadows, its church tower, old and gray, pointing heavenward, the bells, sweet and silvery, ringing in the evening air? Did the Pillars indeed walk the Hindcup streets still—unchanged, self-centered, self-delighted as of yore? While for herself,

THE LADDER

everything seemed changing, dissolving round her, crumbling away; no foothold anywhere. An hour passed thus, and then the nurse came and beckoned to Miriam. She went into the next room and stood beside the bed where Herman lay. The nurse looked at him and shook her head. As they stood there the dying man opened his eyes and smiled, a strange, wondering smile; turned his head to one side as if listening to some distant sound, and then with a quick movement leaned forward, crying out with an indescribable accent of surprise, "I hear! I hear!—O Miriam, what is this that I hear?"

The nurse sprang forward to support him, and he fell back against her arm.

"Ah! let me help him," Miriam cried. The woman shook her head.

"Neither you nor I can help him now," she said, laying him back gently on the pillows. For a few minutes he still breathed. Miriam stood silent before the supreme mystery enacting itself there. With averted eyes, and scarcely daring to breathe, she awaited the final moment.

"He is gone," the other woman said at last, and added in a whisper, "I wonder what he heard?"

Miriam knew. She stepped forward and laid her hand on Herman's brow, smoothing out the lines that pain had written across it. Words she had known from childhood sounded in her ears, words of awe and import:

"Great God! what do I see and hear?
The end of things created."

TO THE STARS

CHAPTER XLV

MIRIAM made a good deal of money and no inconsiderable amount of fame by her book. It was a mystery never solved in Hindcup, however, why she did not, or rather how she could help coming down to her native place, to flaunt her successes before the relations and friends who had known her in the days of her obscurity.

They were all dying to see her now; Emmie wrote, begging her to come and stay with them.

"We are growing out of all acquaintance now," she said; "and we want to hear all about you; we read things in newspapers, but, of course, we don't *quite* believe them; how you dined with this and that person—people you never heard of, I am sure. If half of it were true, it must make you want to go on writing. Really, it's wonderful how you've got on, and it's so well you have this to amuse you. I remember I found poker-work a resource myself before I married."

The candor of this home appreciation made Miriam smile; but she did not accept Emmie's invitation.

"I cannot come to Hindcup just now," she wrote, "because I am going abroad for a long time with Delia Gore."

"Set her up! Going abroad with Miss Gore, indeed! There won't be any speaking to her when she

THE LADDER

returns," was Aunt Pillar's comment on this piece of news. It was commented on upstairs at the Manor as well as downstairs, and with equal severity:

"Do you know, Samuel, that Delia is taking that curious Miriam Sadler abroad with her?" said Lady Joyce. "Of course she has made quite a name for herself with this book; but she is *Mrs. Pillar's niece* just as surely as she used to be, and it seems a little strange, does it not?"

"Not a little," puffed Sir Samuel; "but the Gores always had curious views about things—revolutionary, I call them; would upset the whole order of things if we all practiced them."

When, at the end of another year, Miriam still declined to return to Hindcup, the cousins were angry.

"I don't suppose we are fine enough for her now," Maggie Broadman said, tossing her head. "It has turned out as Aunt Pillar said it would; she has been going about too much with those Gores."

"And making a lot of money is spoiling her, too," Emmie suggested. "Sydney says it isn't natural for women to be independent. I daresay she gives herself great airs with it all now."

But when at long last Miriam returned to Hindcup, the cousins were forced to confess that all their conjectures had been false: she had none of the "airs" they had hoped to observe in her; she seldom mentioned the Gores; and indeed Emmie had to screw out any information about them by a series of direct questions.

"Miriam, did you see anything of that brother of Miss Gore's?"

TO THE STARS

"Yes, I saw him."

"When, then? Was he abroad, too?"

"He came to Italy for a few weeks when we were there."

"Then he isn't married yet? Aunt Pillar said he was going to be married."

"No, he is not married."

"Why not, then? Is he still engaged?"

"I believe not."

"O Miriam, how provoking you are! Why did he break it off? Surely, you know."

"I believe they quarreled; the reason why most engagements are broken off."

"What did they quarrel *about*, though? Has she married some one else, or what?"

"Really, Emmie, I didn't catechise Mr. Gore as you catechise me," said Miriam, impatient of her questioning; and Emmie retorted that she never had been like other women, with a natural interest in love affairs.

"I wouldn't have lived as long as you did with them and not found out all about that," she said; "but I believe you know more than you say." Which was probably true.

Miriam, it must be confessed, looked much, much older. She had to undergo a fire of criticism on this point from all her relations.

"Well now, Miriam, I must say you look your age; and more," was Aunt Pillar's plain-spoken verdict when she beheld her niece for the first time. A family dinner at Maggie Broadman's was the occasion; all the cousins were there—Emmie and Dr. Pratt, Matilda

THE LADDER

and her husband, Grace, the (alas!) still unmated one, Timothy, and Aunt Pillar.

Miriam had never seen Timothy since that evening which now seemed so long ago, the evening at the inn in Hampshire. A stab seemed to go right through her heart as she took his fat red hand at the moment of greeting. Why should this big, common lump of clay still cumber the ground, and Herman be gone from the world? She gave such a shiver that Maggie bade her come nearer the fire, as if that could warm her! Timothy, too, as he shook hands with his cousin had a vision of that strange scene at the inn, a vision which he tried to forget. Some rumor of Herman's death had penetrated to Hindcup, but that Miriam had gone to see him had never been revealed by Cochrane's folded lips.

"We are all quite afraid of our famous cousin," quoth Timothy, with attempted jocularly, and Aunt Pillar took another long stare at Miriam through her spectacles.

"Famous or not," she said, "you've gone off a lot, for a woman of your age."

"You forget how old I am getting," Miriam said. But in Hindcup circles any open mention of a woman's age is considered a heinous transgression. On all sides there was a chorus of:

"Hush, hush, Miriam! Fie, Miriam! We don't mention the age of ladies."

"Oh, *do* remember you're shaming us *all* when you speak that way!" And from Grace, the spinster, came a pained giggle and a cry of "I never speak about *my* age!"

TO THE STARS

Fortunately the dinner bell rang at this moment and created a welcome diversion.

Miriam sat between Mr. Broadman and Aunt Pillar, a target for their remarks.

"Well, I've read your book," Aunt Pillar began, between great spoonfuls of soup, sucked in with great appreciation; "I've read your book. When I've heard that all's well with the dinner at the Manor, you may say my day's work is done, and I have an hour of quiet (I'll thank you for another helping of that soup, Maggie; it's excellent). Well, as I was saying, there's generally a free hour in the evening, and though I generally reckon it a waste of time to take a book, I made an exception and read yours. Her ladyship asked me herself had I read it. It was wonderful she should take any notice of it, I thought; so I bought it. 'Yes,' I said, 'if her own fam'ly won't buy her books, *who will?*' So I bought it, though I considered it dear."

"I'm sure it is," the author admitted, "for all there is in it."

"Well, of course, being written by you, it interested us," Aunt Pillar said, meaning to be genial, "but no doubt it wouldn't have so much interest for other people."

She leaned back in her chair, clasping her fat hands over her satin-clad person.

"What's coming, Maggie?" she asked. "I've really done so well with that soup, I hope it's something light."

"Quite light, aunt; only roast pork," said Maggie; and no one seemed to question the truth of the reply.

THE LADDER

"I'm very fond of pork, but you should have warned me, my dear; it's scarcely doing it justice to have two platefuls of that ox-tail beforehand. Well, as I was saying, Miriam, that book interested me because you wrote it; I wondered where you learned many a thing there was in it; it isn't as if you were a young woman of any experience."

Miriam attempted no explanation, and here Emmie, from across the table, struck in:

"We bought a copy, too, and Sydney read it aloud to me; but really there was a lot of it we didn't understand. There were so many strange ideas in it; where did you get them? I suppose you got them from these Gores that you think so much of?"

"The Gores are coming to the Manor next week, did you know?" Aunt Pillar asked. She had finished the roast pork, wiped her glistening lips with the extreme end of her table napkin, and now leaned back to rest from her labors and cast a questioning glance at the sideboard to see what the next course was to be.

"Yes, I know," said Miriam.

"Perhaps her ladyship may ask you to tea while they are there; there's no saying but she might. It would be a great honor," said Aunt Pillar.

"I hope not; I wouldn't in the least care to go," said Miriam inadvertently.

"Not care to go!" Aunt Pillar echoed.

"Well, honestly, Aunt Pillar, Sir Samuel and Lady Joyce have always seemed to me very ordinary, rather tiresome sort of people," said Miriam, fool that she was.

TO THE STARS

Aunt Pillar turned right round in her seat to take a good look at her niece.

"Well, if that's all your travels have taught you, it's a pity you went on them; to call the fam'ly at the Manor ordinary!" Her face flushed with anger at the impertinence of the word.

Miriam was anxious to justify herself; she could not realize that it was impossible for Aunt Pillar to see things as she saw them.

"I have come to see that it is what people are in themselves that makes them worth knowing, not their position," she said; "and once or twice at the Gores I have met Lady Joyce and Sir Samuel, and they did not seem to have anything new or interesting to say, and they did not seem to be interested in anything except their own little bit of the world; that was what I meant by calling them ordinary."

But Aunt Pillar was not to be appeased. Long ago she had formed her estimate of her niece, and time was only bearing it out now.

"I shall be very thankful if I don't live to be ashamed of her," she had said to Alan Gore years ago; now she felt that the words had been prophetic: she was ashamed of Miriam. Always an enigma to her relations, she was now an impossible problem to them, a problem that Aunt Pillar for one frankly gave up trying to solve, from the hour she heard the family at the Manor called ordinary.

THE LADDER

CHAPTER XLVI

MIRIAM had come to Hindcup as the guest of Emmie and Dr. Pratt, so it was in their company that most of her time was spent. The house faced southward and streetward, commanding in this way all the sunshine and gossip that was going; it was not one of the old houses, nor one of the aggressively new ones, but a middle-aged building, square, solid, and painted white, so that it shone from afar among the dingier houses of the straggling uphill street. A trimly kept garden, with a straight path running through it up to the door, separated the house from the road; this path offered good opportunities to Emmie's gossip-loving soul, for from a vantage ground behind the Venetian blinds she could observe everyone who came up to her husband's surgery as well as most of the passers-by in the street. The drawing-room window looked out across the garden to the road, and while sitting at the window you felt as if you were camped on the roadside. This feeling of publicity which would have been a trial to most people was Emmie's chiefest joy.

"Isn't it delightful seeing everything that goes on?" she would say. "Really, I waste my time at this window!" She did indeed; but what was more provoking, she wasted the time of other people. Miriam had brought a lot of books down from town, hoping to get

TO THE STARS

them read in "the quiet of the country"; though she might have known better.

"Miriam! Stop reading for a minute and look at Fanny Jones's new hat!"

Miriam would glance up and murmur a half-hearted comment on the hat. Then two or three minutes of silence would follow, till Emmie saw fresh subject for interest:

"There's Abbot's cart stopping at Mrs. Hobbes's door; look, he's taking in a small sirloin. I am glad they can afford sirloin, I'm sure."

Another silence; then in a whisper, though why Emmie thought it better to interrupt by a whisper, it is difficult to imagine.

"Miriam! I'm sorry to interrupt again, but if you look up *quickly* you'll see Louie Evans going into the bank; she is flirting with Tom Beech; I daresay they'll make it out before next year."

Finally Miriam laid aside all pretense of reading, and drew her chair frankly up to the windows to watch the passers-by—it was better than being forced to do it against her will.

As she sat thus, listening to Emmie's remarks, a very absurd thing happened, which happens oftener than any of us are aware of: both these young women were pitying each other profoundly! Miriam pitied her cousin because her whole life seemed to consist of nothing but this sort of peddling interest in the affairs of other people; while Emmie's pity for Miriam was stirred by the thought that she had no husband, or house of her own, or any prospect of getting either, "only ideas and unsatisfactory things like that," as she

THE LADDER

contemptuously phrased it. Miriam was longing to be back in London, busy with work she loved, and meeting people who interested her; while Emmie in her really kind little heart kept hoping that her cousin was not feeling *too* envious of her life with Sydney Pratt in Hindcup!

"She can't help envying me, Sydney," she would say to Dr. Pratt, "seeing me with you, and my house, and everything."

Dr. Pratt, however, was not quite certain about this.

"I do not know that either I or my house would satisfy her," he said darkly.

Once every week Emmie had what she called an "at home" day. She spent the morning in dusting the drawing-room and "arranging the flowers." By this last expression she meant gathering close off by the head a profusion of blossoms, and packing them tightly into fancy vases. Lunch was always rather hurried on the "at home" day, and immediately after the meal Emmie ran upstairs to dress. Half an hour later she came down to the newly dusted drawing-room wearing her last "Sunday" dress; then drawing her chair up to the window, she adjusted the blind so that she might, without being seen, be able to see who was coming in. By three o'clock Hindcup visitors began to arrive, and at half-past three Emmie did not think it too early to offer them a cup of tea. This was brought in, ready poured out in the cups, and handed round by the hotly blushing young maidservant, who looked as if she would drop the heavy tray from her trembling hands every minute. Emmie then, herself, passed round a

TO THE STARS

wicker tea stand containing a plate of crumbly bread and butter, and another plate of very rich plum cake. As each visitor departed, she ran to the window, and from behind the blinds watched the guest go down the path to the gate. But at sight of another guest arriving, she would skip back to her seat, and be ready to rise from it in well-feigned surprise when the visitor was announced.

Of course all the neighbors came to see Miriam, Mr. and Mrs. Hobbes, just as of old, being among the first to arrive. It hurt Miriam to notice that they were a little in awe of her; she did not like to see it. Somehow the Hobbeses did not seem so objectionable as of yore; for memory, like a bright mist, covers up many an unlovely object, changing and sanctifying it almost beyond recognition. People that in the long ago were wearisome and distasteful to us, are changed by time and distance into classic figures we would not willingly miss from the background of our lives.

Miriam found it quite pleasant to sit and listen to Mrs. Hobbes's wandering talk on domestic affairs, and Mrs. Hobbes, in her turn, was touched by the sympathetic attention shown in her affairs. She laid her hand on Miriam's knee a trifle timidly, saying:

"I was so afraid to come to see you, but indeed I need not have been afraid; I think you're much improved, my dear."

The Broadmans came in then, and Timothy; and the little room was quite filled up.

Timothy had decided he must try to efface the unpleasant memory that he felt sure still lingered in his cousin's mind. He came and sat down beside her,

THE LADDER

balancing one of Emmie's uncomfortably small tea-cups in his large red hands, and began to try to be pleasant. Mr. Hobbes, too, drew his chair up to the sofa and essayed conversation. But just as Miriam was wondering what she would say to them, she saw the door open again, and heard the little maidservant announce in her frightened, piping voice:

"Mr. Gore, ma'am, to call on Miss Sadler."

There was a moment of tense silence. Emmie stood up, not very sure what to do or say, and Miriam struggled out of her corner between Timothy and Mr. Hobbes, and went across the room to meet her visitor.

Emmie, much embarrassed, begged this unexpected and distinguished visitor to sit down and have some tea. The tea was accepted, but the plum cake was refused, at which Emmie repeated several times:

"Oh, do be persuaded; let me persuade you!"

Silence had fallen among the other guests; they were all listening and looking. Miriam had a sudden moment of intolerable discomfort; everything seemed wrong. She wished Alan Gore had not come; it would be only a pain to see him here.

But the next minute all these painful feelings disappeared, for Alan Gore sat down and began to talk to Emmie as if he had always known her, and Emmie seemed to forget to be shy, and answered his remarks quite coherently. Timothy, too, drawn as if by a magnet, was coming gradually nearer to where Gore sat, till suddenly he joined in the conversation with what seemed to Miriam a surprisingly intelligent remark.

TO THE STARS

It was the old story of the man who carried a talisman under his tongue. Miriam could scarcely believe what she saw. Without apparent effort, Alan Gore had actually beguiled her cousin Timothy into conversation that was quite interesting, and made Emmie forget her shyness altogether; she remembered how he had done the same years ago with her, in the library at Hindcup—how her shyness and constraint had fallen away, and she had blurted out all her raw young ambitions and unremarkable difficulties to him.

Could it be her cousin Timothy, the traveler in wineglasses, who sat there talking like that? Timothy, it appeared then, had thoughts—not original ones in the least, but quite fairly intelligent thoughts—and could express them, too, in quite respectable language!

How ashamed she felt all of a sudden; why could she not find this great secret of true living which Alan Gore had the key to? All her life she had missed it. She could enter with eager sympathy into the interests of people who were congenial to her; but from those who were uncongenial she must always hold herself aloof. Once again Miriam confessed in her heart the old confession that she was “all wrong somewhere.”

In ten minutes Alan Gore had found out more of the nature of her cousin Timothy than she had been able to discover in all the years of her life; and Emmie—Emmie sat there telling him how the curate's wife had wanted to get up a Reading Society, “to improve our minds, you know,” but she had “no time to read,” and “did he think reading was as necessary as

THE LADDER

clever people thought it?—people like Miriam?" (That was another stab to poor Miriam.)

By some matchless art, or tact, or gift, Alan Gore drew Emmie and Timothy so out of themselves that their conversation was entirely natural; he seemed to be able to get at that core of reality which is somewhere to be found in the dullest natures, and arrived at this, past all the unrealities, he discovered some interest in them almost in spite of themselves.

Miriam drew her chair in beside Emmie. She, too, wanted to join in their conversation. But in a moment Emmie and Timothy shut up like oysters. Timothy pulled at his watch and declared that he must be off to catch a train, and Emmie suddenly reassumed her constrained manner and began to apologize profusely to Alan Gore for the fact that she must go and speak to Mrs. Hobbes at the other side of the room.

"Do you see," Miriam said, when Emmie had gone, "I can't do it. I can't get on to the right lines with them, try as I may."

Gore put down the toy teacup with which Emmie had burdened him, and looked at her. His pleasant eyes laughed, though he kept unsmiling lips.

"Why," he said, "it seems to me that your relations are exceedingly easy to get on with. I wish all of mine were as easy." He paused and smiled, adding: "I wonder now if you would get on better with my people than I do, and *vice versa*?"

"Oh, I don't suppose I should. I very seldom get on well with anyone, it seems to me," said Miriam, who was suffering a great discouragement just at that moment.

TO THE STARS

"I think too much Hindcup must be the reason for this low view of things," said he. "What do you do all day here?"

"Very little; which perhaps accounts for the despondency."

"Do you not go out in the fields now, as you used to do? I remember—do you remember, long ago when I met you there, and you asked me about the books?"

"Remember? O Mr. Gore, how could I forget? Life only began for me with those books!" Miriam cried.

"Well, why don't you walk there to-morrow, shall we say about this time?" Gore said. He leaned forward, looking straight at her as he spoke; for a moment she met his glance, and then she turned away.

The little room seemed to spin round and round. Snatches of talk between Emmie and Mrs. Hobbes floated across to where they sat. "She, now, was what I would call a thoroughly well-trained girl." . . . "No, Mrs. Hobbes, I can't say I've a great idea of Abbot's meat," etc., etc.

Alan Gore rose and held out his hand to Miriam:

"Shall I see you to-morrow, then, about this time?" he said.

"Yes," she answered, and turned away.

"Dear me!" Emmie exclaimed as the door closed behind him, "I'd no idea Mr. Gore was like that; he's very agreeable. I wonder what ever made him come in this afternoon? I was quite flustered, for Jemima gave him a cup of tea Mr. Hobbes had refused, so I

THE LADDER

knew it must have been cold. Well, it was very polite in him, and he made me forget all about his being so fine and well known. I declare I said a lot of silly things to him, now I come to remember what we talked about."

TO THE STARS

CHAPTER XLVII

"I AM sure I don't see why anyone should wish to take country walks," Emmie said as she walked down to the garden gate with her cousin the next afternoon. "It's so much more amusing to pop in to tea with one's neighbors than to tramp over these damp fields you are so fond of, Miriam."

"I've always loved the fields, Emmie, and you know I hate going out to tea," said Miriam; but her excuse was not accepted.

"I believe that about not going out to tea is something you learned from the Gores," she said; "it isn't possible that anyone can *really* dislike tea parties. I believe it's a fashion, for some reason or other, and yet that Mr. Gore didn't seem to object yesterday, and I'm sure he would be an addition to any party."

Miriam laughed and walked away down the street. She passed her old home, and stood at the gate for a moment to look in. Behind these uninteresting little windows she had transacted so much of life! The branches of the elm tree still scraped against the sill of her bedroom window as of old; the flowering currant bush at the door was coming out and she smelled its spicy breath that she used to love in childhood; she almost expected to see her mother come to the door, watering-can in hand, to water the tulips in the border; but another face looked out at the well-known

THE LADDER

door, and Miriam walked on quickly, with that feeling of injury we feel to see strangers occupying our old homes. Is it some premonition of the day certainly coming for each of us, when our place shall neither know us nor miss us more?

She walked on, past The Old House where Miss Foxe used to live. Miss Foxe had died a year ago, and the house was shut up and deserted-looking, with closed shutters and tags of last year's creeper hanging untidily from the walls.

But out in the spring meadows there was no strangeness or desolation to face. No change passes over the kindly earth from year to year; the flowers and grasses we knew in childhood come up as green and fair to-day as they did then.

Miriam knew where to look for every plant—some were just coming up, some not yet in blossom. She remembered where a plant of pink primroses used to grow, and there they were, punctual to the season's call, poking up through the moist brown earth. As she walked along the little meandering path that led to the stile where she had sat that eventful day when she met Alan Gore, the whole scene came back so vividly to her mind that for a moment she wondered if all the intervening years had been a long dream that she had dreamed sitting there on the stile. Miriam had heard of dreams that seemed to extend over eons of time; had this been one of them? Had she ever gone to London to visit the Gores? Had she struggled and failed, and struggled again and succeeded? Had poor Herman been nothing but a brilliant phantasm, his tragic death a nightmare bit of the dream?

TO THE STARS

Miriam looked down at her dress; it was a handsome, well-made garment, and she half expected to see it turn into the blue calico she used to wear. She drew off her gloves and fingered them, expecting to see their soft leathern surface change into the well-remembered white cotton glove of her girlhood.

But far less believable than these outside things was something else: Why had she come here this afternoon? Why had Alan Gore asked her to meet him? No; the past with all its pains and difficulties might be true, but this could be nothing but some curious delusion that had overtaken her. Perhaps she had dreamed it vividly last night? Yet it wasn't a dream that Alan Gore had come to see her yesterday; that was certain enough; it was his asking her to meet him that was the dream. . . . Miriam leaned back against the rail of the stile with half-closed eyes; all round her the spring world was bursting into leaf and blossom—stirring and stretching itself as it were, after the long despair of winter. The air was full of the fragrance of young leaves; in the blossoming thickets the birds sang loud and clear. A sense of renewal was everywhere—grass growing fresh and green out of the brown earth; tender shoots appearing from the dry, dead-looking stumps of the hedgerows that had been ruthlessly pruned away; sheets of blossom covering the thorn bushes—everywhere life and sap and strength—a goodly world.

As Miriam sat there and looked and listened, something of this spirit of renewal seemed to waken in her heart. For as we die many deaths before the last, so by gracious processes of healing the spirit may be born

THE LADDER TO THE STARS

again into a newer and brighter life. Miriam looked back across the dark years of her life, much as one looks back at a thundercloud which has rolled away behind one. They had been dark, but the sun was shining overhead now, and life was sweet again. She was young still, in spite of Aunt Pillar's plain words to the contrary; young and, yes, happy. The word came to her almost as a surprise.

Far off across the fields Miriam saw Alan Gore coming. He walked quickly, as if impatient of the distance to be got over. She rose to meet him; but a wave of joy, a premonition of happiness, such as she had never dreamed of, held her silent.

(1)

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